



OH&S STEWARDS BULLETIN

How HEU OH&S stewards work with the JOHS committee

This is the first of two Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) steward bulletins outlining the role of an HEU OH&S steward as well as the duties and functions of the Joint Occupational Health and Safety (JOHS) committee. The *Workers Compensation Act* addresses 10 duties and functions of the JOHS committee. In this bulletin, we will examine the first five.

Duties and functions of joint committee

130 A joint committee has the following duties and functions in relation to its workplace:

- (a) to identify situations that may be unhealthy or unsafe for workers and advise on effective systems for responding to those situations;

This is one of the most important duties of the committee, but how do you identify situations that are unhealthy or unsafe? As a committee, you should review all hazard reports and incident investigations, including near misses. As an OH&S steward, you should participate in workplace inspections and/or review the reports. You can also send out a survey to identify unhealthy and/or unsafe hazards. In addition, you have the right and responsibility to actively participate in discussing potential solutions to the risks identified and, if necessary, make written recommendations to the employer (Division 4, sec. 133).

- (b) to consider and expeditiously deal with complaints relating to the health and safety of workers;

*When workers fill out a hazard report or in any other way bring a health and safety concern to a member of the JOHS committee, they have the right to expect that those concerns will be addressed in a timely manner by the employer. As a member of the committee representing those workers, you have every right to insist that urgent issues are addressed quickly and appropriately. Urgent issues should not have to wait until the next meeting to be addressed. (**Remember that the time spent ensuring these issues are addressed should be employer-paid.**)*

- (c) to consult with workers and the employer on issues related to occupational health and safety and occupational environment;

As committee members, you are not expected to solve all the workplace health and safety issues independently. You can talk to the workers directly affected and their supervisors and managers as necessary. Often those most at risk from health and safety hazards in their environment know how best to address those hazards.

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(d) to make recommendations to the employer and the workers for the improvement of the occupational health and safety and occupational environment of workers;
As committee members, you don't have to wait for an injury/illness or near miss to make recommendations to improve safety at the work site or in a department.

(e) to make recommendations to the employer on educational programs promoting the health and safety of workers and compliance with this Part and the regulations and to monitor their effectiveness;

Occupational health and safety education is not limited to JOHS committee members. The employer is responsible to ensure that workers know about OH&S hazards and have the training and education necessary to do their job as safely as possible. This could include education on violence in the workplace or on use of new equipment, early signs and symptoms of MSIs, etc. As a frontline worker and OHS steward, you are in a unique position to advise the employer on what education is needed and see if that education is meeting the needs of your members.

If there are other topics or questions of a general nature you'd like to see addressed in an OH&S Stewards Bulletin, please contact either Della McGaw or Ana Rahmat, HEU's OH&S representatives at ohs@heu.org.

For more information, check HEU's website at www.heu.org.

In solidarity,

Della McGaw
OH&S Representative
Hospital Employees' Union
Direct line: 604-456-7029
Email: dmcgaw@heu.org

Ana Rahmat
OH&S Representative
Hospital Employees' Union
Direct line: 604-456-7102
Email: arahmat@heu.org

HEU's toll-free switchboard: 1-800-663-5813; or fax: 604-739-1510.

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