



POLICY UPDATE

News for members of the Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce January 23, 1998

What do you think of Occupational Health and Safety?

On January 1, 1997, a new Occupational Health and Safety Act was introduced in Nova Scotia. For the employer this has meant a significant increase in accountability and the responsibilities regarding the administration of occupational health and safety in the workplace. Yet many employers, while sensitive to safety issues, may still be unaware of the degree of these changes and how they apply to their business.

The centrepieces of this new legislation are the workplace safety policy, the workplace safety program, the employee safety representative, and workplace safety committees.

Did you know:

As of July 1, 1997, if you employ five or more employees on a regular basis, you must have a written Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) policy and a trained OH&S representative?

As of July 1, 1997, if you employ twenty or more employees on a regular basis, you must have a trained Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee?

As of January 1, 1998, if you employ twenty or more employees on a regular basis, you must have a written safety program?

While the Chamber's Task Force on Occupational Health and Safety supports the concept of improved workplace safety, they are concerned over the use of company size as the determinant of risk in a given workplace.

The Department of Labour struggled with this issue and basically settled on the size criteria as a workable option. The Task Force believes that the criteria could instead be based on the type of work, and the level of risk associated with it.

The current size-based system does not take into account the level of risk for smaller employers in hazardous industries such as construction or scientific research; nor the low risk in large administrative offices such as legal or accounting firms. Such an approach penalizes large companies with low risk and does little to address the needs of high risk small firms.

Do you share this concern? Could you suggest alternative ways to define or measure risk in the workplace (ie accident histories, risk self-assessment or others)? Do you have a suggestion that could replace company size as the trigger for stricter safety standards?

If you would like more information about the requirements of the new Act and how they apply to your business, please refer to the article in the December issue of *Business Voice* (page 8), or call the Department of Labour at 424-1234.

PLEASE FAX BACK TO 468-7333 BY JANUARY 30

Are you aware of the new health and safety requirements?	Yes	No
Are you, in your opinion, in compliance with these new requirements?	Yes	No
Do you believe company size is an appropriate trigger for stricter safety measures?	Yes	No
What practical alternatives would you suggest?	_____	

Your responses will be used in future discussions with the Department of Labour.

Thank you for responding.



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