

# Working in summer

## OHS information for employers and workers

This resource provides information for employers and workers about health and safety when working during the summer months.

### Key information

Employers have an obligation to ensure the health and safety of workers.

Being ready for summer conditions means being aware of hazards and being prepared.

Alberta's unpredictable weather creates many hazardous conditions. Under Alberta's occupational health and safety legislation, employers must do everything that is reasonably possible to protect the health and safety of workers and others at the work site.

Workers also have an obligation to take reasonable care to protect the health and safety of themselves and others at and around the work site.

This bulletin outlines some common summer hazards and ways to address those hazards; however, there may be additional requirements related to your work site or the type of work you do.

As summer approaches, review your hazard assessment to help identify any additional seasonal hazards. Ensure all hazards are identified and all identified hazards are addressed.

- Employers must provide adequate first aid measures at the work site. Ensure first aiders at the work site receive proper training.

Alberta's *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, section 3(1) states:



Every employer shall ensure, as far as it is reasonably practicable for the employer to do so,

- (a) the health and safety and welfare of
  - (i) workers engaged in the work of that employer,
  - (ii) those workers not engaged in the work of that employer but present at the work site at which that work is being carried out, and
  - (iii) other persons at or in the vicinity of the work site who may be affected by the hazards originating from the work site,

## Extreme heat

Summer temperatures in Alberta can exceed 30°C. Early signs of heat stress include muscle cramps, dehydration, headache and dizziness.

Examples of controls include:

- Work indoors in controlled temperature environments whenever possible.
- Establish a cooling station.
- Educate workers on the signs of heat stress.
- Make sure plenty of cool water is available at the work site. The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety recommends workers should drink about 250 ml of water every 15 to 20 minutes to stay hydrated when working in extreme heat, even if they do not feel thirsty.
- Change the timing of work so work is done in shade or in cooler morning hours.

- Use a work-rest schedule – where rest is in a cool place – to control the amount of time workers are exposed to the heat.
- Be aware that personal protective equipment (PPE), including face masks, can intensify hot conditions.
  - Employers should consider engineering and administrative controls that can protect workers without increasing heat exposure.

These are potential considerations for work site parties. Work site parties should use a qualified person to conduct hazard assessments and implement hazard controls, which may include other measures than what are stated above. If one person is showing signs of heat stress, assume that other workers may also be affected. Workers should report to a cool area and be assessed individually before work continues.

See [Best practice: Working safely in the heat and cold](#) for more information on the health risks of working in hot weather conditions.

## Sun exposure

Sunburn can occur even on cloudy days. Long-term exposure to the UV radiation from sunlight can increase the risk of developing skin cancer. To protect themselves from the sun and dangerous UV rays, workers should:

- Work inside when possible.
- Coordinate work to maximize time in shaded areas (for example, work on the west side of a building in the morning and east side in the afternoon).
- Wear protective clothing, including hats, sunglasses and light, long sleeved shirts.
- Use a sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher that has both UVA and UVB protection.

## Summer storms

Summer storms can come up suddenly and bring with them new hazards, including high winds, heavy rain, hail, lightning and tornados. Consider developing a summer storm procedure as a proactive measure.

- Monitor the weather and have a safety plan in place before the storm hits.
- Establish stop work and seek shelter parameters.
- Secure items that might get blown around in the wind, for example scaffolding or roofing materials.
- Stay away from windows and skylights.

## Insects

Mosquitos, ticks and stinging insects can cause health hazards, ranging from simple skin irritation to severe allergic reactions or disease transmission.

To protect from insects:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts that are close-fitting around the wrists, long pants that can be tucked into socks or boots, hats and closed-toed shoes.
- Wear light colours like beige or khaki. Avoid bright colours.
- Avoid using colognes, perfumes, scented soaps or deodorants.



Use insect repellants to protect against tick and mosquito bites. [Read](#) about insect repellent use and safety on Health Canada's website.

### Mosquitoes

Some examples of controls to protect workers include:

- Avoid leaving standing water, such as puddles, or containers full of water on the work site as these provide breeding grounds for mosquitoes.
- Avoid working near standing water when mosquitos are most active.
- Avoid working outdoors at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active.
- Use DEET or icaridin-based products to protect from mosquito bites.
- Wear long sleeved shirts and long pants to protect from mosquito bits.

### Ticks

Some examples of controls to protect workers include:

- Ticks are found in leafy, wooded areas.

- Use DEET or icaridin-based products to protect from tick bites.
- After working outdoors, check skin and clothing.
- Wash clothes and dry them in a hot dryer to kill any ticks.
- Shower within two hours of working outdoors.
- Remove ticks as soon as you notice them.

### Stinging insects

Some examples of controls to protect workers include:

- Keep work areas clean. Wasps are attracted to garbage and food.
- Stinging insects usually don't sting unless they are attacked, do not swat at them. Remain calm and slowly walk away or allow the insect to fly away.
- If attacked by a swarm, cover your face with your hands and run from the area – preferably indoors.
- If a stinging insect is in your vehicle, stop the vehicle and open the windows.
- Workers who are allergic to stings should carry an epinephrine pen and wear a medical alert bracelet.
- Tie back long hair to avoid insects from getting entangled in your hair.
- Insect repellants do not protect against stinging insects.

## Chemical exposure

Pesticides, fertilizers, cleaning and painting chemicals are a common aspect of working in summer and are considered hazardous materials.

When hazardous materials are used in the workplace, follow WHMIS requirements. To learn about WHMIS requirements read [WHMIS 2015 information for employers](#) and [WHMIS 2015 information for workers](#). Refer to the safety data sheet (SDS) for the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to use with a specific cleaner or disinfectant.

For chemicals that do not have an SDS, including consumer products, employers must still provide training on health effects, safe work procedures, safe use, PPE and storage.

It is important that workers be trained on how to select and use the PPE needed with hazardous materials. PPE may include gloves, safety glasses, gowns and face shields.

## Wildfire and smoke

Smoke from wildfires is a common occurrence during the summer in Alberta. Smoky air can be a health hazard for those working outdoors.

If working in smoke can't be avoided:

- provide cool, ventilated and smoke free break areas,
- monitor public health warnings,
- reduce physical activity levels to decrease the amount of smoke inhaled,
- ensure workers stay hydrated and keep their nose and mouth moist,
- educate workers to recognize signs and symptoms of smoke exposure, and
- provide the necessary respiratory equipment and instruction in accordance with Part 18 of the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Code,

Learn more about wildfire smoke as a workplace hazard in [Wildfire smoke](#).

## Contact us

### OHS Contact Centre

Report serious incidents, make immediate danger complaints, ask OHS questions

Anywhere in Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690
- Edmonton & surrounding area
- 780-415-8690

Deaf or hearing impaired

- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)
- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)

### File a complaint online

[ohsComplaintsPortal.labour.alberta.ca](https://ohsComplaintsPortal.labour.alberta.ca)

### Online incident reporting

Potentially serious, mine or mine site incidents

[oirportal.labour.alberta.ca](https://oirportal.labour.alberta.ca)

### Website

[alberta.ca/OHS](https://alberta.ca/OHS)

## For more information

### Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety: Heat and hydration

[cchohs.ca/newsletters/hsreport/issues/2012/05/ezine.html](https://cchohs.ca/newsletters/hsreport/issues/2012/05/ezine.html)

### Wildfire smoke (FI007)

[ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/fi007](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/fi007)

### Working Safely in the Heat and Cold - Best Practice (GS006)

[ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/gs006](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/gs006)

### WHMIS 2015 information for employers (CH008)

[ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/ch008](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/ch008)

### WHMIS 2015 information for workers (CH007)

[ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/ch007](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/ch007)

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