

Introduction to Occupational Health and Safety

Introduction to Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

Key concepts, objectives, legal framework, and practical steps for creating a safe workplace.

1. What Is Occupational Health and Safety?

Element	Definition
Occupational Health (OH)	Protection and promotion of workers' physical, mental, and social well-being in the work environment.
Occupational Safety (OS)	Prevention of accidents, injuries, and hazardous incidents caused by work activities, equipment, or surroundings.
OHS	Integrated approach that combines OH and OS to create a safe, healthy, and productive workplace.

2. Core Objectives of OHS

- 1. Prevent workplace injuries and illnesses**
 - Reduce accidents, near-misses, and occupational diseases.
- 2. Comply with legal and regulatory requirements**
 - Meet national standards and industry-specific rules.
- 3. Protect employee welfare and morale**
 - Foster a culture of care, trust, and engagement.
- 4. Enhance productivity and profitability**
 - Lower absenteeism, turnover, and compensation costs.
- 5. Promote continuous improvement**
 - Use data, audits, and feedback to refine safety systems.

3. Legal & Regulatory Foundations

Region / Body	Key Legislation / Standard	Main Requirements
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Introduction to Occupational Health and Safety

United States	OSHA Act (1970)	Employer responsibility for a “safe and healthful” workplace; hazard communication, record keeping.
European Union	EU OSHA Directives (e.g., 89/391/EEC)	Risk assessments, employee consultation, preventive measures.
Canada	Canada Labour Code, Provincial Acts	Joint employer/employee duties, safety committees, reporting.
Australia	Work Health and Safety Act (2011)	Primary duty of care, consultation, training, incident notification.
International	ISO 45001 (2018)	Management system for OHS, risk-based approach, continual improvement.

Tip: Identify the specific statutes that apply to your industry and jurisdiction; keep them in an accessible “OHS Reference Binder.”

4. The OHS Management System (OHSM)

A systematic framework that turns policy into practice.

1. Policy & Commitment

- Written OHS policy signed by senior management.
- Clear statement of goals, responsibilities, and resources.

2. Planning

- **Hazard Identification & Risk Assessment (HIRA)** – systematic process (e.g., Job Safety Analysis, Failure Mode Effects Analysis).
- **Legal & Other Requirements** – compile applicable laws, standards, contracts.
- **Objectives & Targets** – measurable (e.g., “Reduce recordable injuries by 20% in 12 months”).

3. Implementation & Operation

- **Roles & Responsibilities** – assign duties (OHS manager, supervisors, workers).
- **Training & Competence** – induction, job-specific, refresher courses.

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- **Control Measures** – hierarchy of controls (elimination, substitution, engineering, administrative, PPE).
- **Communication** – toolbox talks, signage, incident reporting channels.
- **Documentation** – procedures, work instructions, records.

4. Performance Evaluation

- **Monitoring & Measurement** – inspections, audits, leading/lagging indicators.
- **Incident Investigation** – root?cause analysis, corrective actions.
- **Management Review** – periodic review of OHSM effectiveness.

5. Improvement

- **Corrective & Preventive Actions (CAP