



A Workplace Safety Strategy for Nova Scotians 2013–2017

*Together, workers
and employers will
make Nova Scotia
the safest place to
work in Canada.*

A safe Nova Scotia is a productive Nova Scotia

Deaths, injuries, work-related illnesses, risk to life and limb are not part of the job. No family should suffer a lost loved one. No worker a debilitating injury or illness at work. No workplace should bear the loss. When all Nova Scotians believe every workplace injury or illness can be prevented – and when prevention is engrained in every workplace culture – Nova Scotians will be safe at work.

A culture of workplace safety is growing in Nova Scotia. It must be nurtured and expanded until all Nova Scotians are aware of and care about the safety performance of their workplace and work to improve that performance. Everyone should feel safe at work. Nova Scotia has many examples of workplace safety excellence. Unfortunately, it has as many examples where risk and injuries are “part of the job.” Tragedy at sea, for instance, should become part of Nova Scotia’s history.

Nova Scotia is a safer place to work today than 10 years ago. Workers’ compensation claims declined 18 per cent and the number of time loss injuries fell about 30 per cent over the past decade. But Nova Scotia still lags other Canadian jurisdictions and is in the middle of the pack in most workplace injury measures.

Some still see workplace safety as a cost. Safety leaders report the opposite. Safety pays, through less time lost, but more importantly, through increased productivity, enhanced morale and loyalty. A safer province is a more productive and prosperous province.

Over the next decade, the nature of work in our province will change. New economic developments like the shipbuilding contract, changing demographics and new technologies will bring new challenges but also new opportunities to improve workplace safety.





Safety leadership – from the top and from every rung on the organizational ladder in every workplace – is key. The Provincial government’s role is as the policy-maker, regulator and enforcer, but it must also lead by employer example across the provincial public sector. It recognizes its responsibility as a leader, to model safety in action, policy and example.

This *2013-2017 Workplace Safety Strategy* retains what worked from the 2003 strategy and focuses new initiatives in areas Nova Scotians identified as priorities during province-wide consultations. Extensive research, including best practices elsewhere, sharpened the focus.

The success of this strategy depends on workers, employers, industry and labour leaders, government, the Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Council and all partners in safety coming together to strengthen the culture of safety in Nova Scotian workplaces. No person or organization can do it alone, but collective effort and strong leadership can and will.

The Strategy

Vision

Together, workers and employers will make Nova Scotia the safest place to work in Canada.

While achieving this vision in just five years may be challenging, steady progress towards this target will be made.

Principles

As the strategy is implemented, the following principles will guide decisions: *transparency; accountability; collaboration and fairness.*

Strategic Goals:

- Nova Scotia workplace safety performance will be among the best in Canada.
 - There will be measurable improvement in Nova Scotia's workplace safety performance relative to the rest of Canada.
 - Nova Scotian workplaces will be safe and Nova Scotians will expect them to be safe.
- Leaders at all levels and across all sectors will demonstrate a commitment to and be accountable for safety in Nova Scotia workplaces.
- The safety culture in Nova Scotia will continuously improve and evolve:
 - Nova Scotians will be aware of workplace safety performance and strategies through ongoing, proactive communications.
 - Nova Scotians will take responsibility for workplace safety and feel safe at work.
- All workplaces will have access to and use the services and resources they need to assist them in achieving competency in workplace safety and improving their safety performance.

Initiatives

The initiatives that follow provide an outline of what the Workers' Compensation Board and the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education will be doing over the next five years to advance this strategy. The collaborative working relationship between the two key organizations has been strengthened through the development of this strategy. While they sustain their individual mandates, the collaboration will continue to grow as they undertake more joint prevention efforts to help make workplaces safe for all Nova Scotians.

The initiatives in this strategy will evolve into action in partnership with many other organizations and in consultation with stakeholders. The primary role of WCB and Labour and Advanced Education is as a 'catalyst' or a 'facilitator' to help drive the cultural change that is needed to make workplaces safer. The two organizations offer support and some resources but cannot – on their own – make workplaces safe. Workers, employers, labour, safety associations, and others will need to develop their own plans and undertake their own initiatives to support this strategy so the collective energy of everyone working together will propel Nova Scotia forward.

Leadership

Leaders must emerge from all sectors and throughout organizations to champion and advocate safe workplaces.

Everyone in the workplace is responsible for safety, but organizational leaders have an enhanced level of accountability. Safe work is an investment that pays off. Understanding workplace safety should be a core competency for all managers and carry real weight in hiring decisions and performance management practices. But safety leaders can come from all levels of an organization, and all leaders need to work together to mentor, champion, and improve workplace safety.

- Efforts will be undertaken to create opportunities for more workers and employers to lead and champion safety excellence in their communities or industries.
- The CEO Charter will be promoted as a tangible way for executives to demonstrate their commitment to workplace safety.
- Industry safety associations have assumed a vital and effective leadership role in workplace safety. These associations need ongoing support and, when and where appropriate, the model should be extended.
- Quality training and frequent communications about safety in the workplace are required.
- Good safety practices will be encouraged and rewarded, for example by recognizing safety as a requirement to participate in business and government supply chains and by integrating safe workplace requirements into procurement processes.



Safety Culture

Changing workplace safety culture requires time and concentrated efforts from a variety of influencers. Success will arrive when safe practices are second nature – the only way to do business – and safety permeates every workplace in the province.



Turning a “blind eye” to risk still happens in too many workplaces, hoping that nothing will go wrong, when what is needed is action to prevent rather than react to injuries. The attitude that injuries go with the job must end. Safety systems that identify and eliminate risks and hazards should be incorporated into strategic organizational plans. Stronger partnerships across labour, industry and government will carry a message about the benefits and necessity of safety.

- Social marketing will be expanded and strengthened to carry safety messages and information directly into workplaces.
- Tools and resources will be developed and made available to engage workers and employers and foster a safety culture in the workplace.
- The Internal Responsibility System’s profile will be elevated and understanding increased by:
 - Introducing and promoting the concept where required.
 - Continually reinforcing the value of the IRS and encouraging implementation.
 - Providing resources to support the development of IRS.
- Communications will strengthen the understanding of the links between safety and other desirable work outcomes. Safe workplaces improve:
 - Productivity through employee loyalty, wellbeing and time on the job.
 - Health and wellness.
 - Return on investment, through less down time, increased productivity, lower absenteeism and increased employee retention.
 - Disability rates and associated costs, including retraining new workers and insurance fees.
- The WCB’s assessment rate rebate pilot program, if successful, will be expanded beyond the construction and trucking sectors.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Providing smaller businesses with access to tools that will help them enhance safety in their workplaces is a priority.

In recent years, a good deal has been done to improve safety practices among large workplaces but small and medium-sized enterprises have not shared the same level of progress.

- Toolkits to help smaller workplaces audit and self-inspect their safety practices will be developed.
- Labour and Advanced Education and WCB websites will be improved to make them more user-friendly, with richer content about safety systems and practices.
- New businesses will receive workplace safety information when they register as a company.
- Working in cooperation with the *Better Business* strategy, the specific impact on small and medium enterprises will be taken into account when new safety regulations are proposed.



Education and Training

Deeper and broader understanding, whether it comes through formal education or quality workplace training, is vital in changing a culture where workplace injury has been accepted as part of the job. In the new safety culture, injuries are preventable and unacceptable.



The provincial imperative to broaden workforce participation and attract new and immigrant workers magnifies the need to ensure all workers and employers know where and how to access competent safety education and training. Employers and workers in all sectors should emerge from training and education that is effective for the size and type of their workplace, with a level of competence that significantly enhances their ability to identify work-related hazards and implement safety systems.

- Regulations will be proposed to make training mandatory for Joint Occupational Health and Safety (JOHS) Committee members and Safety Representatives.
- Workplace health and safety education will be enhanced. A representative group of stakeholders, including safety associations, industry, unions, Nova Scotia Community College, universities, safety training organizations and others will work together to gain a greater understanding of what safety training and education is currently available and help identify opportunities to make workplace safety content more broadly available in the future.
- Workplace safety content will be included in work-based and preparation-for-work programs and services offered through the Department of Labour and Advanced Education.
- Working collaboratively with other government departments, workplace safety will be included in work-oriented and preparatory programs offered by those departments.
- The workplace safety programming in the public school system (P-12) will be expanded.
- Collaborating with post-secondary institutions, workplace safety programming will be extended to future business and other leaders and professions as appropriate.

Inspection and Enforcement

Workplace inspection and enforcement of safety laws and regulations are valuable opportunities to promote better safety practices.

There is consistent evidence that workplace inspections and enforcement activities lead to safer workplaces. At times, Nova Scotia's inspection and enforcement resources are diverted by the need to respond to complaints. Working together, the WCB and Labour and Advanced Education will better balance complaint-driven inspections with targeted inspections of higher-risk workplaces. Together, the two organizations will more effectively identify trends that impact workplace safety and be better positioned to raise awareness about injury prevention, as inspection becomes an important source of information and coaching on prevention.

- Promote broader understanding of OHS Regulations by making more easy-to-understand materials broadly available.
- WCB and Labour and Advanced Education resources will be aligned to improve efficiency in providing information and education related to OHS regulations and increase compliance with those regulations.
- Safety inspections will be balanced to target identified workplaces and respond to complaints.
- Labour and Advanced Education will review the Administrative Penalty system and process.



Performance Management and Measurement

Workplace safety is now measured almost exclusively by failure – injuries and lives lost on the job; time lost to work-related injury. Those lagging indicators are important and will continue to be measured. New tools are needed, however, to help Nova Scotian workers and employers determine if they are doing the right things to keep workers safe.



Determining, defining and implementing meaningful performance measures for workplace safety in general and for safe practices specific to sectors and industries will require a broad collaborative effort with stakeholders across the province.

- Data and analysis will be more easily and freely shared within and across sectors, stakeholders and workplaces.
- Increased information and better analysis will be more effectively used in planning, targeting workplaces and to identify emerging trends. For example, data showing that 60 per cent of time loss injuries in Nova Scotia result from Musculoskeletal Injuries (MSI) will result in programs focused on preventing those types of injuries.
- Just as certain injuries are more common, certain sectors are also facing challenges. We will regularly develop plans to address challenges in sectors such as fishing, government and health care where injury rates indicate special attention is warranted.
- Better use of national and inter-jurisdictional data will help identify best safety practices and emerging trends.
- To encourage safety performance improvement and use of leading indicators, templates will be developed to:
 - Help workplaces measure the level, execution and discipline of safety practices.
 - Identify safety hazards.
 - Manage safety risks.

Safe and Productive Working Lives

This is a five-year plan to strengthen and improve workplace safety in Nova Scotia. Productive relationships are critical to its success. Those include the relationship between Nova Scotia Labour and Advanced Education and the WCB, but even more important are relationships across industries, sectors, labour and various segments of our economy. Moving this strategy from implementation to action will be the subject of ongoing consultation and collaboration with safety stakeholders and with workers and employers across Nova Scotia.

Safe workplaces keep Nova Scotians healthy. Healthy Nova Scotians contribute to safer workplaces. Healthy workers are less likely to get injured and if injured are able to get back to work more easily. That symbiotic relationship should be encouraged and promoted in workplaces across the province as consistent with and complementary to the provincial health strategies, *Better Care Sooner*; *The Mental Health and Addictions Strategy* and *Thrive* as well as other safety-related initiatives such as the Road Safety Action Plan.

This is not only a government strategy and a WCB strategy, but is a Nova Scotian strategy developed by Nova Scotians, for Nova Scotians. Like all plans, it was developed and written at a point in time. It must therefore be implemented with flexibility and in recognition that changing circumstances and conditions overtake even the best of plans. Technology changes almost daily. Implementation of the strategy will need to keep pace.

Over five years, Nova Scotians working together, day-by-day will eliminate risks and change risk-takers. Leaders will emerge who seek and find ways to champion safe workplaces. More Nova Scotians will go to work every day confident in the knowledge they will return home to their families healthy and whole.

It starts with Nova Scotians demanding safe workplaces; employers caring enough to ensure all work is safe work, and everyone helping make it happen.

Into Action

Hundreds of individuals and organizations in all parts of the province offered their time, experience and ideas to deliver this workplace strategy to Nova Scotians. Their efforts will continue and they will need to be joined by thousands more, in every workplace, to put the plan into action and further its goals.

Selected key actions to put the strategy to work are:

| | New | Underway |
|---|-----|----------|
| Leadership | | |
| Create opportunities to champion leadership, engage workplace partners and safety excellence | | ✓ |
| Identify and implement leadership roles and initiatives | ✓ | |
| Safety Culture | | |
| Develop marketing and communications plans to advance strategic goals | ✓ | |
| Refresh websites to improve ease of access to tools, information and resources including IRS* supports | ✓ | |
| Small and Medium-sized Enterprises | | |
| Create working group | ✓ | |
| Identify priority needs, develop and launch tools to assist and establish safe practices for smaller workplaces | ✓ | |
| Education and Training | | |
| Regulations will be proposed for mandatory training for JOHS Committee members and Safety Representatives | ✓ | |
| Assemble a working group to survey programming and new opportunities | ✓ | |
| Embed safety in workplace preparation programs and services | | ✓ |
| Workplace safety content in the public school system (P-12) will be expanded | ✓ | |
| Inspection and Enforcement | | |
| Broaden understanding of regulations, increase compliance through inspection and education | | ✓ |
| Review the Administrative Penalty system | | ✓ |
| Performance Management and Measurement | | |
| Identify leading performance measures for the strategic goals | ✓ | |
| Develop a safe patient lift, transfer and repositioning program targeting injury prevention and safe work practices in the health care industry | | ✓ |
| Improve information-sharing and data quality | ✓ | |
| Establish improvement framework in high risk injury sectors | ✓ | |

*IRS – The Internal Responsibility System is the system whereby everyone within an organization has direct responsibility for health and safety as an essential part of their work. Every person takes initiative to improve health and safety on an on-going basis. This is the foundation of the Occupational Health and Safety Act in Nova Scotia.



