

Psychological Health and Safety



Roadmap

WorkplaceNL

Health | Safety | Compensation

Glossary 3

Introduction 4

Assessment Roadmap 5

Step One: Identify Hazards 7

Step Two: Evaluate Risk 9

Step Three: Find Solutions 10

Step Four: Evaluate and Monitor 13

Conclusion 13

Need Help? 13

Appendix A: Assessment Tool 14

Appendix B: Resources 17

CONTENTS





GLOSSARY

Control: Method used to protect workers from workplace hazards.

Harm: An injury or damage to health.¹

Mental health: A state of well-being in which an individual is fully aware of their abilities, can cope with life stresses, work productively and contribute to their community.²

Psychosocial hazard: Elements of the work environment, organization and management practices that pose a risk to a worker's mental health and well-being.

Psychological health: Often used interchangeably with mental health.

Psychological health and safety: The environment of the workplace and the actions of the employer, which aim to prevent psychological harm and foster positive mental well-being for all workers.

Risk: The combination of the likelihood of harm and the severity of that harm.³

Risk assessment: A formal process of identifying potential hazards and risks in a workplace and assessing the risk of injury or harm to workers if hazards are not managed.

Well-being at work: All aspects of working life, including work organization, social factors at work, work environment, equipment and hazardous tasks can affect a person's mental health.⁴

¹ CSA Group, CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013 (R2022), Psychological health and safety in the workplace

² World Health Organization

³ CSA Group, CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013 (R2022), Psychological health and safety in the workplace

⁴ CSA Group, CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013 (R2022), Psychological health and safety in the workplace

INTRODUCTION

Workers have the right to safe and healthy workplaces that are free from hazards, including those that could cause harm to their psychological well-being. A psychologically safe and healthy workplace promotes workers' well-being and actively works to prevent harm to their psychological health.

In addition, investing in **psychological health and safety (PHS)** in your workplace is good for business. When you protect workplace mental health, the result is increased productivity, lower absenteeism and decreased disability costs.

There are many ways that employers can identify and manage workplace hazards. A risk assessment is a great first step as it plays a key role in finding and addressing hazards.

This resource will show you how to assess psychosocial hazards step-by-step with the goal of reducing the risk of harm to workers' mental health with practical solutions.

Small changes can make a big difference in your workplace, and we're here to help every step of the way.

Let's get started!



ASSESSMENT ROADMAP

The process of assessing PHS involves four steps:



Each of these steps must include **employer commitment** and **worker consultation**.

Employer commitment:

Employer commitment is needed to create a workplace where people feel safe, supported and respected. Employers and other leaders in the business show this by actively finding and addressing psychosocial hazards in consultation with workers. Employers can also demonstrate their commitment by providing training about mental health in the workplace, discussing psychosocial hazards and having regular check-ins with workers.

Worker consultation:

Finding and addressing psychosocial hazards requires meaningful consultation with workers. Consultation is an ongoing process that involves workers participating in discussions about issues affecting their health, safety and well-being.

Consultation can take many forms depending on what works best for the workplace and workers. Offering more than one option helps workers engage in discussions. Some examples of worker consultation include one-on-one discussions, feedback surveys, discussing psychosocial hazards during meetings and OHS Committee, WHS Representative or Designate participation.

Workers should be encouraged to ask questions, raise issues, help solve problems and share their knowledge and experience.

Scenario Introduction

Harbour Square is a small contracting company that specializes in interior and exterior painting, landscaping, snow clearing, window cleaning and minor household repairs.

In recent years, the company has seen rapid growth in client demand and is struggling with staffing shortages, high turnover and the need for new equipment. These challenges have led to long hours, extra tasks, inadequate equipment and staff not always being trained. As a result, workers report feeling overworked, stressed and disrespected by coworkers and customers. Sick leave is increasing, and several workers have given notice.

The owner and managers are concerned about worker health and safety. One manager, Susan, took the initiative to explore ways to help staff manage workloads and work processes to reduce stress. Susan consulted with workers and recommended to the management team that they include PHS in the OHS policy statement and conduct a risk assessment.

Management creates a Risk Assessment Team which includes workers from all work areas, a supervisor and a representative from the OHS Committee to conduct a risk assessment.



Scenario

Harbour Square's new Risk Assessment Team take many actions to assess PHS risk:

- Review meeting minutes, hazard **reports** and incident reports
- Observe work in the field
- Gather worker feedback
- Review training records

They **identify the following hazards**:

- High job demands due to staff shortages and increased workloads
- Low job control due to the nature of their work
- Lack of engagement with workers in how they do their work
- Poor support from management and supervisors
- Poor workplace environmental conditions due to outdoor weather conditions and lack of appropriate clothing
- Disrespect from customers and coworkers



Step One: Identify Hazards

The first step of the risk assessment is to find the psychosocial hazards. This involves examining job tasks, work environment and situations that could cause stress and psychological harm.

Some common examples of psychosocial hazards are:

- low job control
- high or low job demands
- uncertainty about job expectations
- poor support
- lack of worker engagement and consultation
- poor change management
- poor workplace relationships
- trauma
- remote or isolated work
- poor environmental conditions
- conflict
- disrespect
- harassment
- bullying
- inadequate reward and recognition

Psychosocial hazards are not as easily seen in workplaces as other hazards. However, there are proven ways to find them. The following are examples of activities that may help you find psychosocial hazards.

Check the activities you do in your workplace and add any that are missing.

If you can't check any off, you should consider which you could start doing to find possible hazards in your workplace.

- ☐ Anonymous worker surveys*
- ☐ Worker interviews
- ☐ Hazard reports
- ☐ Focus groups
- ☐ Worker observation
- ☐ Review of incident and workplace inspection reports
- ☐ Trend analysis
- ☐ Examine Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) usage
- ☐ Look for unresolved issues in meeting minutes
- ☐ Review education and training records to determine if staff have been adequately trained for job tasks
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

*Check the Resources section for a sample survey.

Scenario

Once hazards were identified, the Risk Assessment Team looked more closely at each to determine the risk. Workers were included in the discussion with the following questions:

- What could happen if there are no changes to the workload?
- What level of stress are most workers experiencing?
- How many workers are affected?
- Are workers consulted when creating the work schedule?
- How often do managers and supervisors reach out to offer support?
- How could a workers' mental health be harmed if nothing changes?



Step Two: Evaluate Risk

Look closely at each hazard to figure out how much risk workers face as part of the work activity or environment – this is essential to assign the priority to remove it from the workplace or reduce the risk of psychological injury to workers.

Ranking or prioritizing risk helps us to determine what to focus on first.

The level of risk is based on:

- Severity (How much harm could it cause?)
- Probability (How likely is exposure?)
- Duration (How often or how long is exposure?)

These are examples of questions that can be used to help determine the level of risk:

- Is it likely that something will occur that will result in injury or illness?
- What is the level of stress experienced by workers?
- Could the harm be considered serious or severe?
- Will it produce long- or short-term effects?
- How many people could be affected?
- How many times per week is a worker exposed?

The process for conducting a risk assessment for PHS hazards follows the same process as assessing all other hazards. See [Appendix A](#) for an example of a risk assessment form.

Scenario

The Risk Assessment Team collaborates with workers to find ways to reduce mental health risks during work tasks. They include:

- Remove unnecessary steps from tasks
- Consult with workers when planning education and training
- Implement a preventative maintenance program
- Develop a harassment prevention plan and associated training
- Request that managers and supervisors make regular visits to worksites
- Encourage regular rest breaks
- Request that managers and supervisors include PHS topics in meeting agendas
- Offer education and training in stress management, mental health first aid, PHS and resilience
- Communicate how to access the EFAP

Step Three: Find Solutions

When psychosocial hazards are identified and risk is determined, solutions or controls are put in place to eliminate the hazard or reduce risk of psychological harm.

The hierarchy of controls is the preferred order to follow when deciding on the type of solution used to manage workplace hazards. The options at the top are the most effective because they address the hazard rather than just reduce the risk. Those at the top consider ways to change the work, as opposed to those on the bottom that focus on changing the worker.

Best practice is to choose as many options as possible, starting at the top and working down to make sure that appropriate solutions are available. It is important to follow-up regularly to determine if solutions are working in cases where it is difficult to change the way work is done.

In consultation with workers, choose the solutions that fall highest on the hierarchy and are practical to implement. Once implemented, check in with workers regularly to make sure solutions are working.

In most cases, you will have a combination of two or more solutions. For example, a workplace may (1) consult with workers on the purchase of new equipment, (2) provide training to use it and (3) hire more people to better manage the schedule to address a single hazard.



Hierarchy of controls for psychosocial hazards

Elimination

Remove the hazard to eliminate the risk of psychological harm.

Substitution

Substitute policies and practices that do not address well-being with those that take worker well-being into account.

Engineering

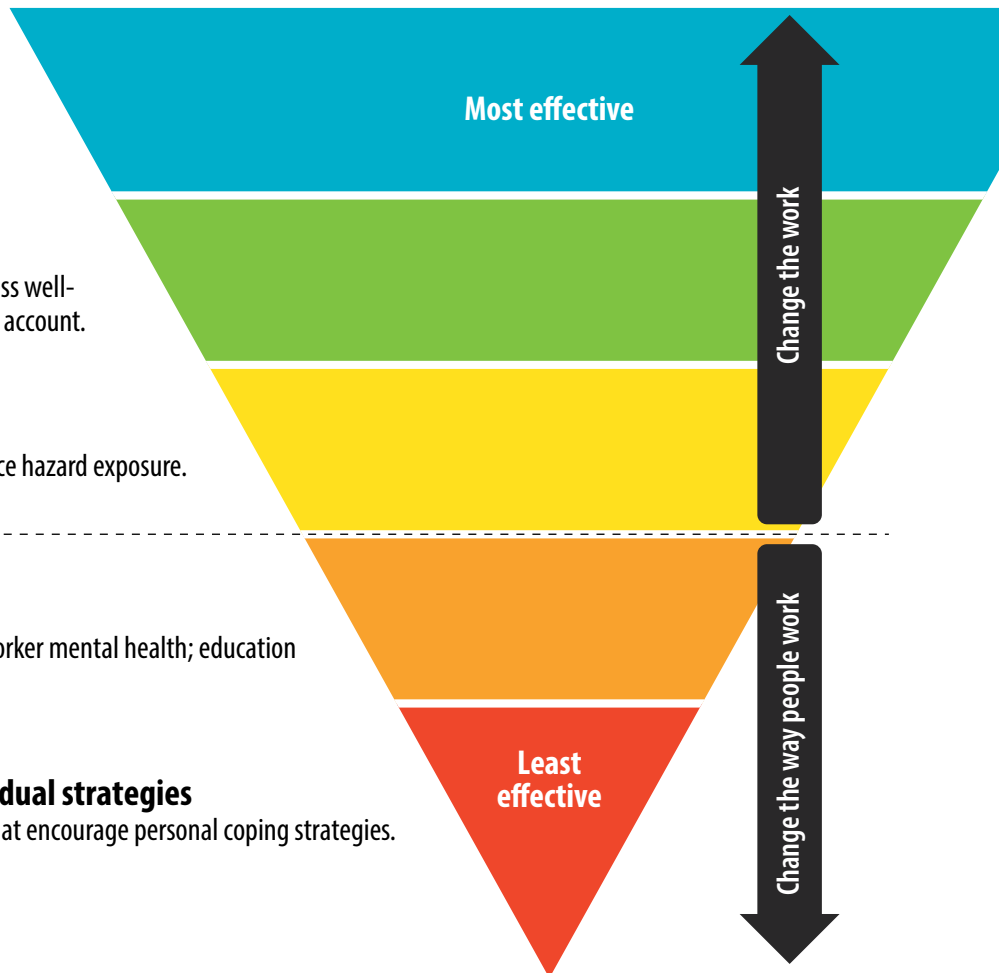
Redesign job tasks and work environment to reduce hazard exposure.

Administrative

Policies, procedures and processes that support worker mental health; education and training.

Personal protective equipment/Individual strategies

Protect workers with PPE, policies and practices that encourage personal coping strategies.



Some examples of **elimination** controls are:

- Remove unnecessary tasks or processes that contribute to excessive workload
- Remove unnecessary policies or procedures that limit flexibility
- Eliminate redundant or overlapping tasks between job roles
- Schedule enough skilled workers to do the work

Some examples of **substitution** controls are:

- Replace a highly stressful task with one that is less stressful
- Replace tasks that have low demands with ones that are more engaging or challenging
- Delegate some tasks to teams rather than individuals to spread the workload

Some examples of **engineering** controls are:

- Provide tools or systems that give workers more control over their tasks (i.e., automation of a repetitive task, automatic staplers, trolleys, mobile ordering, curbside pickup)
- Install barriers between workers and clients
- Secure buildings and install panic buttons

Some examples of **administrative** controls are:

- Design safe systems by managing how, where and when work is done, as well as who does the work
- Implement policies and procedures that promote mental health, like stress management programs
- Provide adequate supervision and support
- Educate and train workers in workplace hazards and controls
- Implement policies that ensure reasonable work hours and breaks
- Introduce job rotation to vary tasks and prevent burnout from repetitive high-demand tasks
- Set realistic deadlines, allowing enough time to complete tasks

Some examples of **personal protective equipment** and **individual strategies** are:

- Provide personal distress alarms for those who need them
- Offer resources or workshops on resilience, adaptability, effective communication and seeking support
- Offer an EFAP or allow time to access mental health supports
- Work environment enhancements (i.e., noise cancelling headphones, desk lamps, adjustable temperature, quiet spaces, focus time)



Step Four: Evaluate and Monitor

Evaluate and monitor the risk assessment every three years as part of your OHS program review to make sure that:

- Equipment and materials have not changed
- New hazards have not been introduced
- Controls are effective
- Emergency response plan is current and considers psychological harm in the event of an emergency
- Workers are adequately trained
- Safe work practices and procedures are being followed
- Procedures for the task have not changed
- Incident trends are reviewed
- There are opportunities for feedback



CONCLUSION

Summary

Creating a psychologically healthy and safe workplace is a smart business investment. Workers who feel psychologically safe are happier, more productive and engaged.

Risk assessments are a great way for employers to find hazards and solutions, following a four-step roadmap:

1. Identify hazards to find workplace conditions and interactions that may harm a workers' mental health.
2. Assess risks to prioritize what gets fixed first.
3. Find solutions to remove hazards or reduce the risk of harm to workers' mental health.
4. Review and monitor controls regularly to ensure effectiveness.

Ongoing employer commitment and worker consultation are essential for success.

Take Action

We encourage all workplaces to follow the roadmap to identify hazards in your workplace and find solutions to reduce the risk of psychological harm. The journey begins with action. Small changes can make a big difference in workplace mental health.

See [Appendix B](#) for additional resources that may help you on your journey.

Need Help?

Contact safety@workplacenl.ca

APPENDIX A: ASSESSMENT TOOL

This is an example of an assessment tool for PHS hazards.

Psychosocial hazards and factors	Job duties	Consequences (possible outcomes)	Injury risk potential (consider severity and probability)	Action required
<p>Job demands</p> <p>Related to the demands placed on workers.</p> <p>High levels of time pressure and role overload can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tasks that are beyond the workers' level of training or experience• Excessive expectations• Unreasonable deadlines for work tasks or asked to complete work tasks outside of work hours• Lack of resources required to complete tasks• Extra work due to absence of team members beyond a short duration				

Psychosocial hazards and factors	Job duties	Consequences (possible outcomes)	Injury risk potential (consider severity and probability)	Action required
<p>Poor support</p> <p>The lack of practical assistance and support.</p> <p>Situations that may lead to workers experiencing poor support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not being provided access to tools, resources, information or coaching needed to do the job • Working in isolation or in geographically dispersed teams • Where managers are required to manage large numbers of workers, making it difficult to provide adequate support to individuals • Workers who do not have time or opportunity within work hours to speak with their colleagues or managers (e.g., highly regimented workplaces such as call centers or medical practices) 				

This is an example of documenting the implementation of controls for PHS hazards:

Priority (based on the assessment)	Identified hazard	Existing control	Additional controls to be implemented	Responsible person	Completion date

APPENDIX B:

RESOURCES

The following are great resources to help identify, evaluate and manage PHS hazards.

WorkplaceNL:

- PRIME Path 2 Toolkit: WorkplaceNL offers a Prime Path 2 Toolkit full of helpful resources to help you develop the 15 elements of your OHS program. You will find PHS assessment and consultation resources in the Element 14 folder.
 - [Download the toolkit](#)
 - [Learn more about Path 2](#)
- Visit our website for resources related to PHS:
 - [FAQs and resources](#)
 - [Psychological Health and Safety Week](#)

Other:

- [ISO 45003:2021: Guidelines for managing psychosocial risks](#)
- [Canada Life: Workplace strategies for mental health](#)
- [Canada Life: Guarding minds at work](#)
- [CCOHS: Workplace mental health toolkit](#)
- [CSA Standard: Psychological health and safety in the workplace](#)

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