

RECOGNIZING AND CONTROLLING HAZARDS



By SCSA Staff

Whether at home or on the job, existing and potential safety hazards are always present, and most of the time, the injuries they cause are preventable. A hazard refers to anything that could potentially cause harm to an individual’s health or safety.

“Although not all hazards are preventable, they can be controlled...just because you have completed a task a million times, does not mean that the hazards are the same each time,” says Ameer Murray, a certified National Construction Safety Officer (NCSO™) and Health and Safety Consultant.

In the safety industry, there is a widely accepted system called the Hierarchy of Hazard Controls, used to minimize or eliminate exposure to hazards. The hierarchy consists of five rungs – starting with the most effective controls at the top moving down to the least effective.

1. **Elimination** – Completely remove the hazard. [E.g. Secure loose electrical cords and remove clutter in high-traffic areas to avoid tripping hazards.]
2. **Substitution** – Replace the hazard with a less hazardous substitute. [E.g. Instead of using harsh chemicals for cleaning, such as bleach and acids, use substances less irritating to the skin and respiratory system.]
3. **Engineering** – Isolate people from the hazard or modify engineered machinery or equipment. [E.g. Place barricades around open holes to prevent falls.]
4. **Administrative** – Change the way people work; modify work practices, policies, housekeeping. [E.g. Place clear signage warning of specific hazards.]

5. **Personal protective equipment** – Protect owners, workers, clients, and anyone else entering a work area with the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). [E.g. Hard hats should be worn to prevent head injuries.]

Prior to starting a task, take time to evaluate the work area and work activity for potential hazards by inspecting work surfaces, tools, and equipment.

“Hazard assessment should be conducted at the beginning of every project, at the beginning of a new task, and whenever the scope of work or conditions change. It is also important to conduct informal hazard assessments throughout the task or project in case a hazard was overlooked,” adds Murray.

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In Saskatchewan, employers have the legal responsibility to identify and control workplace hazards to protect workers. Likewise, workers have the right to know what hazards are present on the job and receive proper training, policies, and procedures to understand how to protect themselves and others. Workers also have a responsibility to work safely; use machinery, equipment and tools in the way they were intended; to report unsafe activities and conditions; and to wear the PPE provided.

The SCSA recently added 10 new topics to its Guide to OHS Legislation mobile app and a mobile hazard assessment tool. The app is available to download at no cost to the user from the Google or Apple stores by searching “SCSA”.

The Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association (SCSA) is an industry-funded, membership-based, non-profit organization that provides cost-effective, accessible safety training advice to nearly 10,000 employers and their employees in the construction industry throughout Saskatchewan to reduce the human and financial losses associated with injuries. The SCSA’s mission is constructing safety leadership.

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