



Addressing longstanding OHS challenges

IWH findings on effective prevention in high-hazard sectors

The Institute for Work & Health (IWH) is an independent, not-for-profit research organization based in Toronto, Canada. Our goal is to protect and improve the health and safety of working people by providing useful, relevant research in two key areas: (1) preventing work-related injury and illness, and (2) promoting recovery and work functioning following injury and illness.

Our work includes exploring and evaluating workplace and policy-level interventions to address longstanding occupational health and safety (OHS) challenges in high-hazard sectors. These include work-related traumatic injuries and diseases in construction, workplace violence in health care, and more.

Effectiveness of mandatory working-at-heights training in construction

Working at heights, a common job task on construction worksites, is a significant safety hazard. In April 2015, the government of Ontario introduced a law requiring employers to provide working-at-heights training to construction workers who use fall protection on the job. An IWH study evaluating the effectiveness of the mandatory training found it led to an average 20 per cent reduction in the rate of lost-time claims due to falls targeted by the training. The reduction was more pronounced in small construction businesses (which saw a 37 per cent reduction) and construction sectors with the most frequent fall injuries (which saw a 22 per cent reduction).

[Read about this study](#)

Costs and benefits of protecting construction workers from cancer-causing hazards

Construction workers are exposed to cancer-causing silica dust when they do jobs such as concrete work, demolition and excavation, to name a few. When working outdoors, they are also exposed to solar ultraviolet radiation, one of the most common causes of work-related cancer in Ontario. A series of studies at IWH examined the cost-effectiveness of interventions aimed at preventing the incidence of work-related cancers in the construction sector. One of the studies compared the costs and benefits of three silica dust reduction strategies. Another examined the use of shade structures and protective clothing to prevent sun exposure. The studies found benefits (mostly realized by health-care systems, workers and their families) substantially outweighed the costs (largely borne by employers).

[Find out more](#)



The 'union safety effect' in Ontario's commercial construction sector

Unionized firms have lower lost-time claim rates compared to their non-unionized counterparts. That's according to a pair of IWH studies in Ontario's industrial, commercial and institutional (ICI) construction sector. The two studies drew on workers' compensation claims data (from 2006 to 2018 in sum) and found lower rates of lost-time injuries in unionized firms when compared to non-unionized firms—14 per cent lower in the first study and 25 per cent lower in the repeat study.

[Read about these studies](#)

Violence reporting in the health-care sector

Despite provincial requirements for hospitals in Ontario to report incidents of workplace violence, a substantial majority of incidents go unreported. That's according to a study at the Institute that also found reporting across health-care facilities to be inconsistent. Reasons for not reporting included worker beliefs that the incident was not serious, that violence is part of the job, and that reporting takes too much time or is pointless. Findings dovetail with another study examining the implementation of anti-violence legislation in Ontario hospitals. Employees identified challenges related to training resources, the quality and consistency of organizational risk assessments, patient-flagging policies, the use of alarms to summon assistance, and the role of security staff.

[Read about these studies](#)

Effectiveness of OHS regulatory enforcement

Regulatory health and safety inspections that result in a citation or penalty are effective in reducing work-related injuries. This is according to a pair of systematic reviews by IWH, one conducted in 2007 and an update conducted in 2015. The review update, which covered the research literature from 1990 to 2013, found strong evidence for the effectiveness of inspections with citations and penalties in reducing injuries. It also found moderate evidence that inspections without penalties have no effect in reducing injuries and that the first inspection has the largest impact on compliance rates, with the impact of subsequent inspections being substantially lower.

[Read about the systematic reviews](#)