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# Evaluation of the Implementation and Effectiveness of the Ontario Working at Heights Training Standard: Final Report

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## **Executive Summary**

The Institute for Work & Health's evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of the Ontario working at heights (WAH) training standard is reported on.

### **Introduction**

As of April 1, 2015, employers were required by regulations under the provincial Occupational Health and Safety Act to ensure that workers on construction projects had successfully completed a WAH training program, if they may use specified methods of fall protection. There was a transition period, until October 1, 2017, for workers who had previously completed fall protection training. The WAH training program standard specifies a basic theory module of at least 3.0 hours in length and a practical module of at least 3.5 hours in length. The program and any training provider delivering the program must be approved by the Chief Prevention Officer, Ministry of Labour.

The evaluation has two overarching questions:

1. To what extent has the WAH training reached the target population?
2. What impact has introduction of the WAH training requirements had on fall prevention on construction projects?

### **Methods in brief**

The evaluation design consists of six elements of data collection and analysis:

- Analysis of Ministry of Labour (MOL) administrative records of WAH training
- Training provider survey -- 87 participants
- Construction employer survey -- 390 participants, from companies varied in size and economic sector
- Learner pre-post follow-up surveys -- 633 participants from the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association's WAH training (internal staff and training partners), varied in experience, sector and location
- Labour inspector interviews -- 10 inspectors from 5 regions
- Analysis of workers' compensation administrative records of lost-time claims

**Evaluation results on program implementation**

The evaluation findings indicate that the WAH training intervention was implemented as intended. The number of training provider organizations steadily increased over time so that about 220 are currently approved. The construction sector and other affected sectors became aware of and undertook the required training by the deadline of October 1, 2017. Among construction employers with six or more employees, 92% were found to be compliant with the requirement to ensure that affected workers were trained. By the transition deadline, about 420,000 Ontario-based learners had successfully completed the training (a number equivalent to 88% of the number of construction workers in Ontario in 2016). The survey of training providers substantiated that, for most, the new WAH training is more comprehensive and practical than the fall protection training their organizations previously delivered.

**Evaluation results on intermediate outcomes**

The evaluation study's surveys with IHSA WAH learners, showed that the training had a large impact on their knowledge about working at heights safety. Substantial improvements were found in ten of 12 self-reported WAH safety practices targeted by the training (including checking for fall hazards, maintaining 100% tie-off, and avoiding shortcuts that compromise safety). Changes at the work site were also evidenced in the survey of construction employers, particularly with regards to the purchase of new equipment, the development of fall rescue plans, and the inspection of equipment. On the other hand, labour inspectors in spring 2017 were not able to discern any changes in work practices attributable to the WAH training on construction sites.

**Evaluation results on final outcome**

Workers' compensation claim data were available until only the year 2017, when the intervention was not yet fully implemented. Nevertheless, a statistically significant impact was found of the WAH training intervention on the construction sector's lost-time claim rate of falls targeted by the intervention. This impact was mostly seen among the smallest employers (less than 5 full-time equivalent employees) and the sectors with the highest claim incidences. Impacts of the training were evidenced in other economic sectors too, including manufacturing and retail & wholesale trade. The full effect of the training program on the prevention of injury cannot yet be measured.

**Discussion: effectiveness of the WAH initiative**

The evidence from the evaluation suggests that on balance the mandatory WAH training standard has been effective. Large effects on knowledge and moderate effects on safety practices were seen in the survey of learners, and the analysis of lost-time compensation claims found a modest impact to date on the fall injuries targeted by the intervention. This pattern is consistent with that seen in research with other OHS training interventions. Nevertheless, many in the stakeholder community, including members of the project's advisory committee find the impact of the WAH initiative on fall injuries and fatalities to be a disappointment. While the full impact of the intervention has not yet been seen, results suggest that further new action by the system to prevent falls would be warranted to meet stakeholder expectations.

**Conclusions**

1. The evaluation found consistent evidence that the mandatory WAH training program reached the target audience.
2. The evaluation found consistent evidence that the training had an impact at the work site. A statistically significant but modest impact on lost-time claims for falls targeted by the intervention was found in 2017.

**Considerations for the future**

The report includes suggestions for improving the WAH curriculum, the WAH program, and working at heights safety more generally. These were gathered through the surveys of providers, learners and employers, and input from the project advisory committee.