

# Understanding the Internal Responsibility System

How shared accountability works under Ontario's OHSA — roles and responsibilities for employers, supervisors, workers, and JHSC members.

IRS

OHSA

Employer Duties

Supervisor Duties

Worker Rights

JHSC

The Internal Responsibility System (IRS) is the foundational principle of Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA). It establishes that all parties in the workplace — employers, supervisors, and workers — share responsibility for maintaining a safe work environment. No single person or regulator carries the full burden alone.

## Key Principles of the IRS

### Employer Responsibility

- Provide safe working conditions, equipment, and procedures
- Establish and maintain a written health and safety policy
- Conduct hazard assessments and implement controls
- Ensure compliance with the OHSA and applicable regulations

### Supervisor Responsibility

- Ensure workers are aware of all workplace hazards
- Confirm workers are trained on safety procedures
- Enforce established safety practices on site
- Report hazards and incidents to management promptly

## Worker Rights and Responsibilities

### Rights

- Right to **know** about hazards in the workplace
- Right to **participate** in health and safety activities
- Right to **refuse unsafe work** without reprisal

### Responsibilities

- Follow all safety procedures and OHSA requirements
- Report hazards, defects, and incidents to a supervisor
- Participate in workplace health and safety activities

## The Role of the JHSC

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A Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) is required in workplaces with **20 or more regularly employed workers**. The JHSC brings together employer and worker representatives to identify hazards, make recommendations to the employer, and monitor the implementation of corrective actions. It is the primary vehicle for worker participation in the IRS.

## Why the IRS Matters

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The IRS creates a shared accountability system where every person at every level contributes to workplace safety. This approach has been proven to reduce incidents and build a stronger safety culture. When the IRS functions well, hazards are caught and resolved internally — before an inspector, an injury, or a fatality forces action.

## Getting Started

*Use this checklist to activate the IRS in your workplace.*

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- Establish clear safety roles and responsibilities in writing
- Train all staff on their specific obligations under the OHSA
- Create a documented process for reporting hazards and incidents
- Hold regular safety meetings and review findings with the team
- Foster open communication — workers must feel safe raising concerns

***Safety is not a department or a sign on the wall. The IRS works when employers lead, supervisors act, and workers speak up. Shared responsibility is not divided responsibility — everyone is accountable, all the time.***