



Volume 1, Chapter 3.07—Health and Safety in the Workplace

2019 Value-for-Money Audit

Why We Did This Audit

- Workplace fatalities and injuries are of a concern to the public.
- We have not audited occupational health and safety for 15 years (2004). Since that time, the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development has assumed responsibility for prevention initiatives from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB).

Why It Matters

- Workplace deaths and injuries affect the worker and their families as well as business operations and productivity. In 2018, 85 people in Ontario died at work and 62,000 were absent from work due to a work-related injury. Another 143 people died from an occupational disease.
- The cost of injury claims to employers through WSIB premiums is about \$2.6 billion each year.

What We Found

- Compared to other Canadian jurisdictions, Ontario has had the lowest lost-time injury rate of any province since 2009 and the second lowest fatality rate in Canada on average from 2013 to 2017. However, Ontario should not be complacent as rates have risen or levelled off in recent years.
- The Ministry's enforcement efforts are not changing the health and safety practices for many employers. We reviewed companies inspected at least three times during the past six fiscal years, and found that many of these companies were issued orders for violations and contraventions related to the same type of hazard in multiple years.
- We estimated the Ministry's system contains only 28% of all businesses in Ontario. The Ministry does not maintain an inventory of all businesses that are subject to inspection. There is no requirement for businesses to register with the Ministry and only construction projects costing \$50,000 or more are required to inform the Ministry, leaving out high-risk industries such as roofing. In 40% of fatality cases sampled from 2017 to 2018, there was no prior record of the associated business in the Ministry's system. Three-quarters of the cases not previously in the Ministry's system were in the construction sector.
- The Ministry uses WSIB injury data and its own compliance data to identify high-risk hazards or workplace/worker characteristics for developing enforcement strategies. However, it does not use this data to identify, rank and select specific higher-risk workplaces for inspection, often leaving companies with the highest injury rates uninspected.
- Although almost half of the Ministry's occupational health and safety budget provides transfer payments to six health and safety associations, the Ministry assesses the performance of the associations solely on outputs and does not know how effective the associations have been at helping to prevent occupational injury and disease.
- The Ministry has not measured the effectiveness of the 2013 *Healthy and Safe Ontario Workplaces Strategy*.

Conclusions

- The Ministry has been successful at consistently maintaining the lowest lost-time injury rate in comparison to other provinces. Further, the rates of injury in each sector are among the lowest in the country. However, the Ministry should not become complacent with these results, as Ontario's rates have levelled off or begun to climb in recent years.
- The Ministry does not have assurance that it is identifying and inspecting all workplaces with a high risk for worker injury or illness. In addition, the Ministry's enforcement and prosecution efforts are allowing some companies to continue their poor health and safety practices.
- Training and consulting services provided by the health and safety associations, are not evaluated for their effectiveness. Therefore, the Ministry cannot ensure that it is receiving value for money from the funding it provides to the associations for prevention activities.