

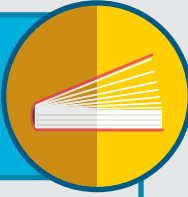


A retail worker's handbook:

occupational health and safety on the job



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Disclaimer

This handbook provides Alberta's retail workers with basic information that may help them stay healthy and safe while on the job.

The information provided in this handbook is solely for the user's information and convenience and, while thought to be accurate and functional, it is provided without warranty of any kind. Further, if there is any inconsistency or conflict between any of the information contained in the handbook and the applicable legislative requirement, the legislative requirement shall prevail. If in doubt, please refer to the current edition of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, Regulations and Code. The Crown, its agents, employees or contractors will not be liable to you for any damages, direct or indirect, arising out of your use of the information contained in this handbook.

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Portions of this publication have been adapted with permission from the WorkSafeBC publication *Health and Safety Guide for New Retail Workers*.

Introduction



This one's for you

If you're already working in retail, or considering a job in the industry, you're in good company. Roughly one in 10 Albertans are employed in the retail sector.

This handbook was written with your workplace health and safety in mind.

You might wonder how a job in retail could put you or your co-workers at risk of injury or illness. If so, this document is already doing its job. Getting you to think about health and safety at work is the first step to helping you stay healthy and safe on the job.

You may be surprised to learn that [Alberta's retail sector ranks above provincial norms when it comes to the number of productive hours reported lost to workplace injuries and illnesses](#). The information in this handbook can help you avoid becoming a statistic.

Because there's more to life than work

Get to know what's expected of you in terms of health and safety on the job, and what you can expect from your employer. And be sure to check out the safety tips. They flag common hazards in the retail industry and provide suggestions on how you can minimize the risk of getting sick or injured on the job.

Health and safety roles and responsibilities



Your employer has responsibilities around keeping you and your co-workers safe while on the job. So do you.

Know what's expected of you in your role. And know what you have the right to expect from others. A safe and healthy workplace is everyone's responsibility.

Your employer's responsibilities:

- **provide a safe and healthy workplace**
- **make sure workers understand what is required of them**
- **make sure workers are competent to do the work or supervised by someone who is competent**
- **educate workers about the presence of any known hazards and the proper use of adopted controls**



Health and safety roles and responsibilities

Your responsibilities as a worker:

- work in a safe manner
- co-operate with your employer by following your employer's health and safety practices
- look out for your own health and safety and for that of your co-workers
- identify and report any hazards or unsafe conditions to your employer
- report incidents by following your employer's incident reporting procedure
- refuse unsafe work when there's imminent danger

Imminent danger refers to a danger that isn't a normal part of your job or the job of someone in your occupation.

You must refuse to do work you believe would put yourself or other workers in imminent danger. To refuse unsafe work you must reasonably believe the work you're being asked to perform poses an imminent danger to your health and safety or to that of other workers.

Example



A worker in the floral department of a grocery store is asked to assist in the deli. Since she hasn't been trained in the safe use of the meat slicer she must refuse the work because doing it would place her in imminent danger.

Health and safety roles and responsibilities

If you believe the task you're being asked to perform poses an imminent danger to your health and safety or that of your co-workers, here's what you should do:

- 1 Don't do the work.
- 2 As soon as possible, tell your employer what you're refusing to do and why. Your employer should then investigate and take action to eliminate the imminent danger. This may include the employer finding a worker who has been properly trained to do the work.
- 3 In the meantime, do other work your employer assigns to you, providing it's safe.
- 4 If your employer doesn't address the situation and communicate the outcome to you, call the Occupational Health and Safety Contact Centre to report.



**Call the Alberta Government
OHS Contact Centre at**

1-866-415-8690 (toll-free in Alberta)

780-415-8690 (in Edmonton)

You cannot be punished or penalized in any way for refusing to do unsafe work in a situation of imminent danger. If this happens to you, report it to the Occupational Health and Safety Contact Centre.

What you can expect from your employer



An employer must provide a safe and healthy workplace for all workers. As a worker, you can expect to receive instruction in safe work practices and procedures, information about any health and safety hazards related to your job, and to participate in the hazard assessment and control process where the outcome will affect you and your work.

Training

Before you begin work, your employer needs to make sure you know how to perform your job in a safe manner. As a worker you are required to take part in training provided by your employer, and to apply what you learn on the job.

You should receive instruction on any safe work practices and procedures as part of the job orientation.

Go ahead and ask

Ask for training if you don't know how to do something safely.

What you can expect from your employer

Unless you have the knowledge and skills you need to work safely on your own, you must be under the direct supervision of someone with that knowledge and skill set.

Know this from the start

Whether you're starting a new job, or transferring into a different position (i.e. job promotion, job rotation or filling in for someone else in a different work area), before you start work you should receive an orientation that includes the following health and safety information:

- **any hazards you may be exposed to, including risks related to potential workplace violence and how to protect yourself**
- **information on the controls in place and instructions on how to do your job safely**
- **the communication plan if you are working alone**
- **how to work safely with any hazardous products, including the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS)**
- **what, if any personal protective equipment is required, who provides it and how and when to wear it**
- **how to get first aid**
- **how to report injuries and other incidents**
- **how to report potential hazards and unsafe work conditions**
- **what to do in an emergency**

If you're missing any of this information, don't be afraid to ask for it. Your supervisor or manager should have all the answers.

What you can expect from your employer

Communication

Information about health and safety in the workplace is information that everyone working there needs to know.

Employers should figure out the most effective way to get health and safety messaging out to you.

You have the right to know

Your employer must tell you about any hazards related to your job and the controls that are in place to help keep you safe.

Look for information here:

- **posters in the staff lunch room**
- **staff meetings**
- **company emails**
- **internal website**
- **paycheque inserts**
- **health and safety committee meetings/publications**

Opportunity to participate

As a worker you need to be aware of any known or potential hazards you could encounter. You need to know how to keep yourself and your co-workers healthy and safe on the job.

The law requires employers to involve affected workers in the identification of potential hazards and their controls. This level of participation makes good sense. After all, who better to provide insight into possible hazards than the people actually doing the work?

What you can expect from your employer

Information about personal protective equipment

Personal protective equipment (commonly referred to as PPE) is individual safety gear or clothing designed to protect workers from injury or illness. It is considered a last line of defense and should be used only when there is no other way to eliminate or control a recognized hazard.

Examples of PPE in the retail industry

PPE	Application
 safety vest	when working around moving equipment (e.g. delivery vehicles, forklifts)
 work gloves and safety footwear	when working in storage areas or handling garbage
 disposable gloves	when cleaning bathrooms
 cut-resistant gloves	when opening cartons or cleaning equipment

What you can expect from your employer

PPE	Application
 dust mask	when exposed to dust (e.g. flour, sawdust)
 eye protection and gloves	when working with chemicals
 hearing protection	when working around loud noises

The majority of retail positions will not require workers to use PPE, but there are some jobs that do (e.g. shipping and receiving, warehouse stockers, forklift operators).

Did you know?



Alberta law requires employers to provide and pay for PPE for emergency response, respiratory and hearing protection if it is required for the job. Any other required PPE (e.g. safety boots, gloves, eye protection) is actually your responsibility.

In any case, **employers must make sure that workers use personal protective equipment when it is necessary, and that you do so safely.**

What you can expect from your employer



Four things to ask your employer:

What, if any protective equipment will I be expected to have and use?

If required, does the company provide it?

Will I need any special training to use it?

If so, when will I receive training?



What to do when something goes wrong



Do you have a health and safety concern?

If you see or hear anything that makes you question your health and safety on the job, or that of your co-workers, you must tell your supervisor immediately. **Follow these steps:**

- 1** Tell your supervisor why you consider the situation to be unsafe.
- 2** If your supervisor doesn't address your concern, speak to whomever your supervisor reports to.
- 3** If no one at work takes your concern seriously, phone the Alberta Government's Occupational Health and Safety Contact Centre.



Call the Alberta Government OHS Contact Centre at

1-866-415-8690 (toll-free in Alberta)

780-415-8690 (in Edmonton)

What to do when something goes wrong

If you or someone else is injured on the job:

- get appropriate medical care right away
- report the incident to your supervisor or manager

A **near miss** is also called a “close call.” It is an incident that did not cause injury or damage but could have under slightly different circumstances. **It’s one of those heart-pounding moments when you realize luck was the only thing that kept you or somebody else from getting hurt.** Every near miss represents a second chance to eliminate or control a hazard, but only if you report it. Report it.



What to do when something goes wrong

First aid

Every employer must ensure some level of first aid is available for workers. There are a few basics you need to know so you can help yourself or your co-workers in the event of an emergency. This information should have been shared with you during your worker orientation. If you don't know the answer to any of the following questions, ask your supervisor.



How well do you know the first aid plan at work?

YES NO

Can you name the designated first aiders on site?

☐ ☐

Do you know how to contact them if you need them?

☐ ☐

Do you know where the first aid kit is located?

☐ ☐

Record what you take

Anyone who accesses supplies from their workplace first aid kit must record what is taken. This is true even if all you need is a Band-Aid. Among other things, the record signals the need to restock the first aid kit.

What to do when something goes wrong

Emergency response awareness

Your employer is required to have written emergency procedures available to everyone at the workplace. As someone who is required to follow the plan in an emergency situation, you need to understand what is expected of you.

If you don't already know what you're expected to do in an emergency, ask your supervisor to go over the relevant sections of the emergency response plan with you.



You should be able to answer the following questions:

Where are the emergency phone numbers posted?

Where are the fire extinguishers?

How and when should fire extinguishers be used?

Where are the fire alarms and fire exits?

What is the evacuation plan for the building?

In case of evacuation, where outside the building is the Muster point and who should you report to?

What other specialized equipment may be needed in case of an emergency, where do you find it and how is it used?

Safety tips



Ten per cent of Alberta's workforce is employed in the retail industry. Every workplace has its own health and safety standards, habits and performance record, but when workplace injuries and illnesses are reported, we can start to see patterns of cause and effect across industries.

What follows are some of the most common causes (hazards) of illness and injury among retail workers, and some tips (controls) on how to avoid becoming a statistic.



Biological hazards



Chemical hazards



Hot surfaces



Ladders



Manual lifting



Repetitive work



Sharp objects



Slips, trips and falls



Struck by objects



Working alone



Workplace violence

Biological hazards



As a retail worker you probably work with a lot of different people (e.g. co-workers and customers) and handle money throughout the day. That may expose you to biological hazards such as viruses, bacteria, cold/flu and body fluids/waste (e.g. blood, vomit, feces).

Hazards



working near customers/
co-workers who are sick



contact with
body fluids/waste



contaminated
sharp objects



contact with
animals/pests

Biological hazards

Common controls

- ✓ **wear appropriate personal protective equipment during high-risk activities** (e.g. cleaning washrooms, administering first aid, cleaning mouse droppings)
- ✓ **receive training in the safe handling and disposal of sharps or other biohazards** (e.g. biohazard cleanup kits, sharps disposal)
- ✓ **be alert to signs of flu and cold and avoid close contact**
- ✓ **wash hands well and often**
- ✓ **take time off work when you are sick**



Safety tips

Always wear disposable waterproof gloves to clean or pick up waste.

Look before putting your hand in, behind, under or between objects.

Lift garbage bags from the top with both hands.

Wash your hands with soap and water thoroughly and often.

Chemical hazards



Working in retail can involve handling hazardous products. These may be part of your store inventory, or they could be in your cleaning supply cabinet and something you use during your regular housekeeping responsibilities on the job.

Hazards



leaks



spills



splashes
(into eye)



skin contact
with chemical



accidental or
inappropriate mixing
of chemicals



inhalation of
toxic fumes

Chemical hazards

Common controls

- ☒ WHMIS training for anyone handling hazardous product
- ☒ proper labelling of hazardous products
- ☒ read the safety data sheets on all hazardous products you may be exposed to
- ☒ follow directions on product labels
- ☒ follow safe work procedures
- ☒ limit number/nature of cleaning products on site
- ☒ use appropriate protective equipment
- ☒ use the chemical as directed
- ☒ store chemicals properly

Chemical hazards

How much do you really know?

Workers who have received proper training in the safe use and handling of hazardous products should know the answers to the following questions:

What are the hazards of the products you're using?

What can you do to protect yourself?

What should you do in case of an emergency or spill?

Where can you get more information on these products?



Safety tips

Read the labels on chemicals.

Use all protective equipment recommended by the manufacturer and employer.

Use chemicals only as directed.

Store chemicals properly when you are done.

Hot surfaces



Many retail settings include self-serve coffee stations or on-the-go hot food items. Setting up these stations, keeping them stocked, cleaning them or even just working around them introduces the possibility of burns.

Hazards

Contact with hot equipment



coffee makers



ovens



rotisseries



vacuum sealing
machines



light bulbs

Contact with hot products or steam



coffee



hot water



soup

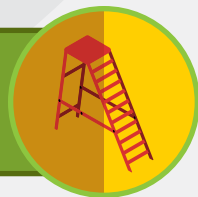
Hot surfaces

Common controls

- ✓ **follow safe work practices** (e.g. keep pot handles/ladles facing away from edges; lift lids back to front; turn equipment off prior to cleaning; dispose of hot remnants carefully)
- ✓ **follow manufacturer's instructions for equipment** (e.g. cleaning, use)
- ✓ **use appropriate utensils/equipment when handling hot objects** (e.g. oven mitts, aprons)
- ✓ **observe and follow posted safety signage**



Ladders



Think about all the things stored up high at your workplace. Getting them down can be a hazard if you don't use the right equipment or you don't use it correctly. Even something as straightforward as changing a light bulb or doing regular maintenance can be a challenge if it's not done right.

Hazards



slipping



falling



over-reaching



losing balance



base shifting,
tipping
or collapsing



not using proper
equipment or
using equipment
improperly



ladder in
poor working
condition

Ladders

Common controls

- ✓ **use the right equipment for the job** (e.g. ladders, step stools)
- ✓ **check to make sure equipment is in good working order before using it** (e.g. not bent or missing any parts)
- ✓ **get training in proper use of equipment**
- ✓ **place ladder on a firm, level surface**
- ✓ **maintain three points of contact at all times**
- ✓ **wear proper footwear** (e.g. flat heels, closed toes, rubber grip sole)



Maintain three-point contact

You should have either **two hands and one foot**, or **two feet and one hand** on the ladder at all times.



Manual lifting



When lifting or carrying a load safely, technique is more important than brute strength. Just because you can lift something doesn't mean you should. Avoid injuries to your back, neck and knees by planning every lift ahead of time and practicing safe lifting techniques.

Hazards



twisting to move product



moving/lifting
heavy materials



jolting movements



repetitive movements

Common controls

- ☒ use safe lifting techniques
- ☒ push, pull or slide instead of lifting when possible
- ☒ use mechanical assistance where appropriate
- ☒ carry fewer items in one load to reduce the burden

Manual lifting



An employer must provide, where reasonably practicable, appropriate equipment for lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling, carrying, handling or transporting heavy or awkward loads.

**Occupational Health and Safety Code,
Part 14, Section 208(1)**



Workers must use the equipment provided for lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling, carrying, handling or transporting heavy or awkward loads.

**Occupational Health and Safety Code,
Part 14, Section 208(3)**



Manual lifting



Safety tips



Adopt a stable position

Make sure your feet are positioned comfortably and are on stable ground.



Use the right muscles

Lift using your leg, butt and abdominal muscles, not your back.



Pace your work

Take your time and make every lift a safe lift.



Close is best

Keep the objects you lift as close to your body as possible.



Turn with your legs, not your back

Avoid rotating or twisting movements and awkward postures when lifting or lowering a load.



Lift smoothly

Jerking or jolting movements place unhealthy levels of stress on joints and muscles.



Less is better

Try to reduce the weight and size of the object you are lifting. It's safer to make repeated light lifts than to attempt a single heavy lift.



Stay centred

Whenever possible, lift from waist level so you aren't bending down or reaching up above your head.

Repetitive work



Think about the tasks you perform. How do you do them and how often?

Improper handling and lifting of objects is a major source of injury. Sprains and strains (musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs)) are the most common type of work-related injury in retail.

Early diagnosis of MSI is important for recovery. The sooner you recognize the signs the better.



Signs and symptoms of MSI include:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☒ swelling | ☒ numbness |
| ☒ redness | ☒ tingling |
| ☒ difficult or pained movement | ☒ pain |

Report any symptoms you may experience to your supervisor as soon as possible.

Repetitive work

Hazards



one-hand grasping,
lifting and swiping
items at the till



repetitive activities



monotony



twisting to
move product



poorly designed workspace

Common controls



use both hands to support objects



routinely switch up tasks throughout a shift



take regular breaks

Repetitive work



Alberta's Employment Standards outline the basic expectations workers can have of their employer regarding everything from work breaks and vacation to pay periods and overtime. If you have general questions, the *Employment Standards Guide for the retail sector* is a good place to start. work.alberta.ca/documents/employment-standards-guide-for-retail-sector.pdf

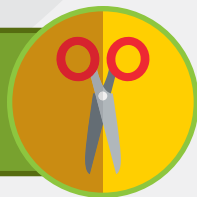


If a worker reports to the employer what the worker believes to be work related symptoms of a musculoskeletal injury, the employer must promptly

- (a) review the activities of that worker, and of other workers doing similar tasks, to identify work-related causes of the symptoms, if any, and
- (b) take corrective measures to avoid further injuries if the causes of the symptoms are work related.

**Occupational Health and Safety Code,
Part 14, Section 211**

Sharp objects



Sharp objects, tools and equipment can bruise, cut or puncture our bodies. Follow safe work procedures when working with sharp tools or around sharp or pointy edges.

Hazards



dull tool requiring
excessive force



sharp rotating
blades



sharp/pointed
objects



cutting an
unbalanced load



unsteady base/
awkward angle



Built-in protection is in place for a reason. Ensure manufacturer's safeguards are engaged and in good working order.

Sharp objects

Common controls

- ☒ **obtain adequate training/instruction**
- ☒ **use the right tool for the job**
- ☒ **maintain tools in good working condition**
(i.e. replace blade as per manufacturer's recommendations)
- ☒ **stabilize an object before cutting**
- ☒ **always cut away from your body**
- ☒ **work from a clean, dry, flat, stationary surface**
- ☒ **engage tool safety feature(s) during use, transport or storage**
- ☒ **use appropriate personal protective equipment**
(e.g. cut-resistant gloves)



If work is to be done that may endanger a worker, the employer must ensure that the work is done

- (a) by a worker who is competent to do the work, or
- (b) by a worker who is working under the direct supervision of a worker who is competent to do the work.

**Occupational Health and Safety Regulation,
Section 13(1)**

Slips, trips and falls



Slips, trips and falls on floors or in cluttered aisles account for many injuries in the retail sector. Think about your work environment. What could create a slipping, tripping or falling hazard in your workplace?

Hazards



puddles due to snow, ice, rain and mud tracked in on shoes from the outside



uneven floors



waxed floors



recently mopped floors



litter/debris



spills or breakage of in-store products or customer food and beverage items



poor lighting



blocked sightlines and/or foot paths



congested workspace



wet footwear in a walk-in freezer or cooler

Slips, trips and falls

Common controls

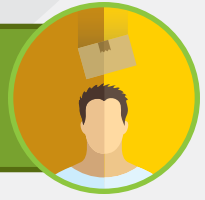
- ✓ **keep floors clean and dry**
- ✓ **turn on lights before entering a workspace**
- ✓ **display warning signage when surfaces may be slippery**
- ✓ **wear proper footwear** (e.g. well-fitting, non-slip)
- ✓ **clean up any spills and breakage right away**
- ✓ **keep lines of sight, aisles and footpaths clear of debris and merchandise**



An employer must ensure that a work site is kept clean and free from materials or equipment that could cause workers to slip or trip.

**Occupational Health and Safety Code,
Part 12, Section 185**

Struck by objects



A falling object can cause significant damage to people and/or property. The hazard can relate to the storage system itself (e.g. shelving, racks, crates, stacks), its location in the workspace (e.g. tucked away or exposed) and/or the way things are stored.

Hazards



poorly designed storage



improperly
secured units/loads



poor location
for storage



improper
storage mode



precariouly stacked
loads



top-heavy loads

Struck by objects

Common controls

- ☒ use storage that's in good condition and designed for the load/job
- ☒ anchor self-standing units to perimeter wall studs/beams for support
- ☒ avoid stacking items too high
- ☒ limit the number of items stored
- ☒ store heaviest items near the bottom
- ☒ contain items stacked on open shelving
(i.e. box, bind or wrap to create symmetrical packages)

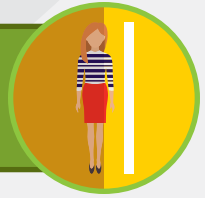


An employer must ensure that racks used to store materials or equipment

- (a) are designed, constructed and maintained to support the load placed on them, and
- (b) are placed on firm foundations that can support the load.

**Occupational Health and Safety Code,
Part 12, Section 187(2)**

Working alone



Working alone is considered a hazard.

While Alberta legislation recognizes it to be its own hazard, working alone may introduce additional hazards that need to be addressed.

Hazards



handling cash



isolated from public view



isolated in the event of
a medical emergency



isolated in the event of
a workplace incident

Common controls

- ☒ **regular check-ins by employer throughout shift**
- ☒ **worker has an effective means of communication to get help in an emergency**
- ☒ **safeguard the workplace** (e.g. good lighting/visibility, alarm system, security cameras, locked back entrance)
- ☒ **specific training** (e.g. robbery awareness training)
- ☒ **specific procedures** (e.g. for working late at night, handling cash)

Working alone



Safety checklist

YES NO

Do you know what to do in an emergency?

☐☐

Do you have a name and number for emergency contact?

☐☐

Do you know who is checking in on you and when?

☐☐

Did you park close to the building in good lighting?

☐☐

Are all the lights on inside and out for good visibility?

☐☐

Are rear doors closed and locked?

☐☐

Have outdoor tasks been completed before dark (e.g. garbage, fuel measurements, public washroom maintenance)?

☐☐

Workplace violence



As a retail worker you may be exposed to workplace violence. The risk of this hazard is even higher if you work alone or late in the evening.

Hazards



working at night



working in isolated
environment



working in poorly
lit environment



working alone



working in or near
high-risk
neighbourhoods



robbery/theft of
goods or cash

Workplace violence

Common controls

- ✓ **if you are required to work alone, your employer must regularly check in throughout each shift**
- ✓ **worker has an effective way to get help in an emergency** (e.g. panic alarm)
- ✓ **safeguard the workplace** (e.g. good lighting/visibility, alarm system, security cameras, locked back entrance)
- ✓ **specific training** (e.g. robbery awareness training, handling irate customers, dealing with difficult co-workers)
- ✓ **specific procedures** (e.g. for working late at night, handling cash)
- ✓ **separate worker(s) from the public with secure, physical barriers** (e.g. shatterproof transparent kiosk, locked doors)

Workplace violence



Are you in-the-know about workplace violence?

YES NO

I know how to recognize workplace violence.

☐☐

I know the policy, procedures and workplace arrangements meant to prevent or protect me from workplace violence.

☐☐

I know the appropriate response to workplace violence, including how to obtain assistance.

☐☐

I know the procedures for reporting, investigating and documenting incidents of workplace violence.

☐☐

If you answered “No” to any of the above, get the information from your employer.

Occupational health and safety legislation



This guide is current to March 2017. It references:

Occupational Health and Safety Act, Chapter O-2, R.S.A. 2000 (current as of January 1, 2016)

Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, AR 62/2003 (with amendments up to AR 182/2013)

Administrative Penalty (*Occupational Health and Safety Act*) Regulation, AR 165/2013

Occupational Health and Safety Code 2009

Occupational Health and Safety Code Explanation Guide 2009

The current occupational health and safety legislation is available on the website at:



work.alberta.ca/ohs-legislation

Official printed versions of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, Regulations and Code Handbook, and the OHS Code Explanation Guide may be purchased from Alberta Queen's Printer:



qp.alberta.ca



7th floor Park Plaza Building
10611 – 98 Avenue NW
Edmonton, AB T5K 2P7



780-427-4952



780-452-0668



qp@gov.ab.ca

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