

Eliminating hazards

A combined effort to ensure a safe and hazard-free workplace

By Carola Hicks

The Health and Safety Representative (HSR)

The *Occupational Health and Safety Act* of Ontario (OHSA) states that any company with six to 19 employees *must* have an HSR who is competent, meaning a person who is:

- Qualified through knowledge, training and experience to organize the work and its performance
- Familiar with the Joint Health and Safety Committee and the regulations that apply to the work
- Knowledgeable about any potential or actual danger to health or safety in the workplace
- Workplaces with more than five but fewer than 20 workers must select, from among themselves, one person to be a health and safety representative

The role of the HSR is to identify and assess workplace hazards, and has the power to make recommendations to the employer on ways to improve workplace health and safety. Other functions of the HSR include:

- Assisting in the development of company policies and standards
- Investigating occupational illness
- Promoting acceptance of company health and safety policies
- Helping to train workers in health and safety

Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC)

The committee, which represents the workers and the employer, is an advisory group that raises awareness of safety issues, recognizes workplace risks and then initiates action to deal with these risks. To achieve its goal, the committee meets and conducts regular workplace inspections. Any workplace that regularly employs 20 or more workers must have a JHSC.

At least two members on the committee are required to be certified – one representing the employer and one representing workers.

Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) certifies members who successfully complete a two-part training program. Part One, Basic Certification, provides an overall knowledge of health and safety that applies to all workplaces. Part Two, Workplace-Specific Hazards Training, focuses on hazards in your particular workplace and how to control or eliminate them. Certified health and safety committee members have specific authority and responsibilities. Certification of committee members is not required at workplaces that regularly employ fewer than 20 workers.

NOTE: Even though dentists are not mandated to provide WSIB coverage for their employees, they are still required by law to have an HSR or JHSC, depending on the number of employees, full- and part-time, on the payroll.