

## Internal Responsibility System

All workplace parties are responsible for health and safety under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA). The greatest responsibility generally falls upon the employer, as they control the workplace, but supervisors and workers also share responsibility. The concept behind this structure, coined by Dr. James Ham as the Internal Responsibility System (IRS), is the foundation of the Ontario Occupational Health & Safety Act (OHSA).

The Internal Responsibility System (IRS) is a structure, within an organization, where everyone, regardless of their role within the organization, has direct responsibility for health and safety as an essential part of his or her job.

One of the purposes of the Ontario Occupational Health & Safety Act is to promote an IRS. Several sections of the OH&S Act encourage the IRS by:

- Giving workers three basic rights: right to know, right to participate, right to refuse unsafe work
- Giving each workplace party specific responsibilities, for example but not limited to:

### Employers

- Create and post a health and safety policy
- Establish a Joint Health & Safety Committee
- Take all reasonable precautions to ensure employee's safety
- Resolve safety hazards and concerns

### Supervisors

- Monitor the work to ensure the work is performed safely
- Ensure workers are trained to do their jobs safely
- Inform workers about hazards within the workplace
- Resolve safety hazards and concerns

### Workers

- Required to adhere to all safety rules and regulations
- Use or wear the equipment, protective devices, or clothing that the employer requires to be used or worn
- Bring identified hazards to the attention of their supervisor

IRS is based on the principle that people in the workplace are in the best position to recognize health and safety hazards, assess them and develop controls because they have the most knowledge about the equipment, the process and the hazards involved. The basis for the success of the IRS is effective communication among workers, supervisors, and the employer.

## Roles of the Joint Health & Safety Committees

The University's Joint Health & Safety Committees have key contributive roles in making the IRS work well by performing the following functions:

- Inspecting the workplace for potential or actual hazard
- Meeting regularly to discuss health & safety issues
- Assisting in investigating critical or fatal incidents
- Monitoring the success of the IRS and recommending improvements where required

## Role of the Ontario Ministry of Labour

Ministry of Labour inspectors cannot be in all workplaces at all times, so workplace parties need to take responsibility for health and safety hazards to the extent that they can control them. The Ministry of Labour's responsibility in the IRS is to make sure workplaces are complying with the Occupational Health & Safety Act, and that the company's IRS is working to address health and safety issues within the workplace.

## A Successful IRS

Successful implementation of the IRS within an organization should:

- Establish responsibility-sharing systems
- Promote a culture of safety and communication
- Promote safety best practices in the workplace
- Result in progressively longer intervals between accidents or incidents
- Assist in developing self-reliance within departments
- Ensure compliance to legislation, policies and procedures

**For more information, visit the Health and Safety website at [www.uwindsor.ca/safety](http://www.uwindsor.ca/safety)**

(Excerpts taken from the Ministry of Labour documents "Measures to Support the Internal Responsibility System", "The Internal Responsibility System in Ontario Mines", Health & Safety Ontario's publication "IRS Primer", the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety website page "OH&S Legislation in Canada – Internal Responsibility System" and Ontario Forestry Safe Workplace Association's publication "Talking Safety: Internal Responsibility System".

For more information:

[https://www.uwindsor.ca/humanresources/sites/uwindsor.ca.humanresources/files/ohs4.1.1b\\_internal\\_responsibility\\_system\\_flowchart\\_0.pdf](https://www.uwindsor.ca/humanresources/sites/uwindsor.ca.humanresources/files/ohs4.1.1b_internal_responsibility_system_flowchart_0.pdf)