Key Terms

**Accident**: A dated term for an event that has led to some degree of harm. See incident.

**Acoustic trauma**: Negative health effects caused by short, intense exposure to noise, usually of high frequency.

**Act**: Law passed by the federal Parliament or a provincial or territorial legislature.

**Acute (or short-term) fatigue**: Fatigue caused by failure to get adequate sleep in the period before a work shift.

**Acute stressors**: Time-specific events of high-intensity, short duration and infrequent occurrence, such as a performance review, a car accident or unexpected encounter.

**Acute toxicity**: The immediate harm caused by exposure to a chemical substance.

**Administrative controls**: A form of hazard control that entails changes to work process, policies, training, or rules designed to reduce exposure to hazards.

**Alcohol testing**: Measuring the amount of alcohol in a worker’s breath or blood to determine impairment.

**Area monitoring**: Measuring the level of a hazard in a geographic space.

**Arises out of employment**: Part of the arises-and-occurs test of injury compensability that assesses whether or not an injury was caused by the nature, conditions, or obligations of employment.

**Arises-and-occurs test**: A test used by a workers’ compensation board to assess whether an injury claim is compensable. To meet this test, an injury must arise from and occur during the course of a worker’s employment.
**Bacteria:** Microscopic organisms that live in soil, water, organic matter, or the bodies of plants and animals.

**Balance of probabilities test:** A standard of proof wherein a proposition is deemed to be true if it is more likely to be true than not based upon the evidence at hand.

**Behaviour-based safety:** An approach to OHS that views the workplace as a venue of measurable behaviour that can be shaped via feedback to prevent injuries.

**Behaviourism:** A learning theory that asserts that attaching rewards and punishments to specific worker actions can shape how workers behave.

**Biological hazards:** Workplace hazards potentially giving rise to injuries caused by organisms—such as bacteria, molds, funguses—or the products of organisms that harm human health.

**Bona fide occupational requirement:** A rule or requirement necessary for the proper performance of a job, which can prevail even if it causes otherwise prohibited discrimination.

**Bullying:** Repeated actions or verbal comments that lead to mental harm, isolation, or humiliation of a worker (or group), often with the intent to wield power over them.

**But for standard:** A test used in cases where it is difficult to assess whether an injury arises and occurs from work that asks whether an injury would have arisen and occurred in the absence of work.

**Capital accumulation process:** The way in which goods and services are produced in a capitalist economy.

**Capitalism:** An economic system wherein the means of production are mostly owned by private individuals, the distribution of goods mostly occurs through market mechanisms, and employers face significant pressure to maximize profitability.

**Capitalist social formation:** The structure of capitalist societies created by the interaction of economic and social systems.

**Careless worker myth:** The notion that workers are accident-prone, careless, or even reckless in the execution of their duties and that these characteristics are the primary cause of workplace injuries.

**Carpal tunnel syndrome:** A cumulative trauma disorder caused by repeated compression of the median nerve in the wrist and resulting in pain as well as loss of coordination, sensation, and circulation.
Catastrophic stressors: A subset of acute stress, but differing in their intensity, threatening life, safety, or property.

Ceiling exposure value (CEV): The concentration of a substance that should never be exceeded in a workplace.

Chemical hazards: Workplace hazards potentially giving rise to injuries caused by a chemical substance that harms human tissue or interferes with normal physiological functioning.

Chronic fatigue syndrome: An ongoing, severe feeling of tiredness not relieved by sleep.

Chronic stressors: Stressors that persist over a sustained period of time and include job insecurity, work overload, or lack of control.

Chronic toxicity: Harm caused by exposure to a substance that manifests itself over a longer period of time.

Circadian rhythms: The daily (24-hour) cycles our body follows to ensure high activity during the day and low activity at night.

Collective liability: One of the Meredith principles underlying workers’ compensation, stating that the cost of injury is shared among all employers in an industry.

Complaint-driven enforcement: A policy wherein workplace inspections are triggered by individual complaints or in response to incidents (i.e., a serious injury or fatality).

Compressed work week: An arrangement wherein workers work longer each day to reduce the number of days per week (or month) that they are required to work.

Consequence: The severity of injury/ill health that will result from an incident.

Control along the path: An approach to hazard control that addresses the hazard at some point between its source and when workers encounter the hazard.

Control at the source: An approach to hazard control that prevents the hazard from entering the workplace via elimination, substitution, or some type of engineering controls.

Control at the worker: An approach to hazard control that controls the hazard only after it reaches the worker.

Cost-benefit approach: An approach to injury prevention that compares the cost of an injury with the cost of injury prevention.
Cumulative trauma disorder: An injury that develops due to repeatedly exposing a part of the body to damage, such as carpal tunnel syndrome.

Dermatitis: Irritation of the skin that often begins with a rash and can lead to severe itching, burning, flaking, cracking, blistering, and bleeding.

Disability: The condition of being unable to perform a function or task as a consequence of a physical or mental impairment.

Disability insurance: Private insurance benefits providing wage-loss replacement for workers who require a longer period of time away from work than can be accommodated under sick leave provisions and that is required for reasons other than a work-related injury.

Disability management: A set of employer practices designed to prevent or reduce workplace disability and help workers to recover normal functioning as quickly and to the maximum degree possible.

Domino theory: An accident analysis model premised on five factors (background, personal defects, unsafe acts and conditions, incident, and injury), the elimination of any one resulting in the prevention of an incident.

Dose: The amount of a chemical that enters the body.

Drug testing: Determining the presence (or absence) of a drug or its metabolic residue in a worker’s body, typically by testing a sample of a worker’s saliva, blood, urine, or hair.

Due diligence: Standard of conduct wherein employers take every reasonable precaution to ensure safety.

Duration: The length of time a worker is exposed to a phenomenon.

Duty to accommodate: Employers’ legal obligation to alter work, work practices, or the workplace to the point of undue hardship in order to allow workers with disabilities to perform meaningful work.

Elimination: A form of hazard control that removes the hazard from the worksite.

Emergency: A sudden event that poses a hazard to workers’ health and safety and requires immediate action.

Emotional labour: Work requiring workers to regulate their emotions to meet organizationally defined rules and to display the required emotions to customers.

Employee assistance program: Employer-funded access to short-term psychological counselling to help employees to cope with personal problems.
Employment standards: An act that sets out minimum terms and conditions of employment for a jurisdiction, such as maximum hours of work and required rest breaks. Sometimes called labour standards.

Employment Strain Model: A holistic model of how employment uncertainty, effort, and support affect precarious workers’ health.

Engineering controls: A form of hazard control that entails modifications to the workplace, equipment, materials, or work processes that reduce workers’ exposure to hazards.

Epidemiologist: Scientists who study the patterns and causes of illness and disease in the population.

Episodic stressors: Events similar to acute stressors, but occurring more frequently, having a longer duration, and often of lower intensity.

Ergonomic hazards: Workplace hazards potentially giving rise to injuries caused by the interaction of work design and the human body.

Ergonomics: The study of how workers and the work environment interact.

Etiology: The cause of an injury of illness.

Exit/Voice/Patience/Neglect: A typology of possible worker responses to occupational health and safety issues.

Experience rating: A system of adjusting an employer’s workers’ compensation premiums based upon the employer’s claims record.

Exposure: How often or regularly workers come in contact with the hazard.

Extended work hours: Hour of work beyond 8 or 12 in a single day.

Externalize: Transfer costs to another actor or enterprise.

False negative: Concluding that no difference or relationship exists when it does.

False positive: Concluding that a difference or relationship exists when it does not.

Fatality benefits: Benefits paid by a workers’ compensation board to the dependents of a worker who has died. These can include funeral costs and wage-loss benefits.

Fatigue: The state of feeling tired, weary, or sleepy caused by insufficient sleep, prolonged mental or physical work, or extended periods of stress or anxiety.

Flexible work arrangements: Altering the normal hours of work in order to accommodate the needs of workers.

Frequency: The vibration of the medium through which energy moves.
Fungi: Plants that lack chlorophyll, such as mushrooms, yeast, and mould.

Gaming: Behaviour whereby an employer maximizes the return it receives from the experience-rating system by means other than improving safety.

Hand-arm vibration: A form of segmental vibration affecting a worker’s hands and arms, often caused by gripping power tools.

Hazard assessment: The process of determining which of identified hazards need to be addressed most urgently.

Hazard control: Implementing corrective measures to eliminate or mitigate the effect of a hazard.

Hazard recognition: The systematic act of identifying all hazards present, or potentially present, in a workplace.

Hazard recognition, assessment, and control: The process of identifying, prioritizing, and eliminating or mitigating workplace hazards.

Heat stroke: A health effect caused by a body becoming too hot.

Hierarchy of controls: A list of hazard controls in descending order of effectiveness.

Human rights legislation: An act prohibiting discrimination on the basis of protected grounds (e.g., disability, age, gender, race).

Hypothermia: A health effect caused by a body becoming too cold.

Idiopathic: Arising from an unknown cause.

Impairment: A cognitive or physical difference that, in a specific context, may give rise to a disability.

Incident: Any undesired event that leads to or could have led to harm to workers.

Incident investigation: The process of determining what caused an incident and identifying ways of preventing its recurrence.

Incident report: A written document outlining the findings of an incident investigation, including recommendations for preventing future incidents.

Index case: The first case that indicates the outbreak of a disease.

Industry safety associations: Bodies formed by employers in an industry to deliver safety services and advocate on behalf of the employers on safety issues.

Instructional design: The process of systematically developing training to meet particular goals and objectives.
Internal responsibility system (IRS): System of shared responsibility for occupational health and safety.

Investigation kit: A collection of materials, including a process, forms, and recording equipment designed to assist in an incident investigation.

Ionizing radiation: Radiation with enough strength to remove electrons from a molecule as it passes through, such as x-rays, gamma rays, alpha particles, and neutrons.

Job Demands-Control Model: A model of workplace stress analyzing the interaction of job demands with job control.

Job design: Decisions employers make about what tasks will be performed by workers and how that work will be performed.

Job sharing: An arrangement wherein two workers share a single position, each working some portion of the otherwise full-time job.

Joint health and safety committees (JHSCs): Committees comprising both worker and management representatives responsible for enhancing workplace health and safety.

Jurisdiction: Geographic district or industry sector which is subject to the authority of the federal Parliament or a provincial or territorial legislature.

Latency period: The time between exposure and the development of symptoms from that exposure.

Learning: The process of acquiring knowledge and skills that can lead to behavioural change.

Learning theories: Conceptual frameworks that describe how learners absorb, process, and retain information.

Legitimacy: Credibility of political actors or a political system that depends upon the actors or system being seen to serve the public good and therefore warranting continued support.

Lethal concentration: The amount of a substance in the air or water required to cause death.

Lethal dose: The amount of a substance required to cause death upon ingestion, thereby quantifying a substance’s acute toxicity and allowing us to compare the toxicity of substances.

Local toxicity: Reaction to a toxic substance reaction at the point of contact.

Location of control: An approach to hazard control focusing on where and when the hazard is controlled in the context of where the worker is in the production process.
Loudness: The amount of energy that is being transported through the medium.

Male norm: The tendency of workplace equipment and processes to assume that workers will be men of average size and ability.

Management rights: The right of an employer to manage and direct the operation of a business bound only by limits set out in law and contract.

Material safety data sheets (MSDSs): Information about hazardous material handling that employers must provide under the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System.

Medical benefits: Benefits paid by a workers’ compensation board to cover the costs of treating an injury, thereby relieving workers and the taxpayer-funded health care system of these costs.

Medical monitoring: Measuring the presence of a chemical or its metabolic residue in a worker’s blood, body fluids, or tissues.

Modified work: An altered set of duties and responsibilities that a worker is able to perform despite an injury or disability.

Near miss: An event that could have, but did not, lead to harm to workers.

Needs assessment: A process to determine what kind of training is required to meet organizational goals.

Negative reinforcement: Removing undesirable stimulus when a worker demonstrates a desired behaviour, in order to elicit further instances of the desired behaviour.

No fault: One of the Meredith principles underlying workers’ compensation, stating that who caused the injury is not a factor in the awarding of compensation.

Noise: Sound energy transmitted by small air-pressure changes caused by the vibration of molecules.

Non-ionizing radiation: Radiation without enough strength to remove electrons from a molecule as it passes through but which may cause other effects, and includes microwaves, radio waves and ultraviolet, visible, and infrared light.

Observer effect: A form of testing error stemming from temporary workplace behaviour change due to the act of testing.

Occupational exposure limit (OEL): The maximum acceptable concentration of a hazardous substance in workplace air.

Occupational segregation: The tendency of men and women to work in different occupations, thereby facing different workplace hazards.
Occurs during the course of employment: Part of the arises-and-occurs test of injury compensability that assesses whether or not an injury has happened at a time and place consistent with the obligations and expectations of employment.

Organizational goals: The outcome(s) an organization expects to realize from training.

Pandemic: A sudden outbreak of disease that is widespread and affects a large portion of the world due to a susceptible population, often with a high mortality rate.

Performance-based regulations: Regulations that identify desired outcomes and leave the specifics of how to achieve them to the employer.

Permanent threshold shift: Permanent loss of hearing due to exposure to noise.

Personal monitoring: Measuring the dose experienced by a worker.

Personal protective equipment (PPE): A form of hazard control that comprises equipment worn by workers designed to protect the workers should they come into contact with a hazard.

Physical hazards: Workplace hazards potentially giving rise to injuries typically (but not always) caused by a transfer of energy that result in an injury.

Political-economy approach: A way of looking at workplace injury that emphasizes issues of power and financial gain.

Positive reinforcement: Rewarding a worker when the worker demonstrates a desired behaviour, in order to elicit further instances of the desired behaviour.

Post-traumatic stress disorder: Ill health typically brought on by a terrifying event, with symptoms including flashbacks, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts about the event.

Precarious employment: Paid work characterized by limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, and low wages and associated with a high risk of ill health.

Precautionary principle: The position that responsibility to establish that the activity will not (or is very unlikely to) cause harm falls to the proponent.

Premiums: The amount paid by an employer for workers’ compensation coverage.
**Prescriptive regulations:** Regulations that stipulate specific requirements an employer must meet (e.g., standards for fall protection equipment).

**Pressures, Disorganization, and Regulatory Failure (PDR) model:** A model that explains the increased health and safety risks associated with precarious employment as the result of precarity’s effects on the workplace structure and practice.

**Presumptive status:** Instances where a workers’ injury is assumed to have arisen and occurred in the course of work unless proven otherwise.

**Prima facie:** A fact or circumstance accepted as correct until proved otherwise.

**Probability:** The likelihood that the hazard will result in an incident.

**Production process:** The steps required to complete work.

**Prosecute:** Court proceedings regarding the violation of a law.

**Proximate cause:** The event that is immediately responsible for the injury.

**Psycho-social hazards:** Workplace hazards potentially giving rise to injuries caused by the social environment and psychological factors in the workplace.

**Racialized workers:** Individuals perceived to be a part of a race or ethnicity (e.g., Black, Hispanic, Asian) to which particular characteristics, often negative, are ascribed.

**Radiation:** Energy emitted from a source, including heat, light, x-rays, microwaves, and other waves and particles.

**Reasonably practicable:** Precautions that are not only possible but are also suitable or rational, given the particular situation.

**Re-enactment:** Recreating the events of an incident to provide a deeper understanding of what happened and why it happened.

**Regulation:** A rule made by a federal, provincial, or territorial cabinet, cabinet minister, or other public body under the authority of an act and having the force of law.

**Reliability:** The degree to which the results of a scientific measurement will produce the same result when repeated.

**Rem:** A standard measure of radiation.

**Reproductive hazards:** Workplace hazards that give rise to injuries to workers’ ability to reproduce or, in the case of pregnancy, to injuries to a fetus.

**Return to work (RTW):** Programs designed to reintegrate injured workers into the workplace via practices such as modified work.
Right to know: Workers’ right to be apprised of workplace hazards under the internal responsibility system.

Right to participate: Workers’ right to engage in workplace health and safety activities (often through joint health and safety committees) under the internal responsibility system.

Right to refuse: Workers’ right to decline to undertake unsafe work under the internal responsibility system.

Risk: Likelihood that a hazard will result in injury/ill health.

Risk assessment: Quantifying the likelihood of injury/ill health by assessing the probability, consequences, and exposure posed by the hazards.

Root cause: The ultimate or “real” cause of an injury.

Routes of entry: The four ways chemicals can get into a workers’ body: inhalation, ingestion, skin absorption, and skin penetration.

Safety management systems: Programs that construct goals and performance measures related to safety, often with the assistance of an outside consultant.

Safety orientation: Training for new workers that addresses workplace hazards, emergency procedures, PPE training, policies, and job-specific OHS.

Scientific certainty: When the risk that a research finding was caused by random chance is less than 5%.

Scientific hypothesis: A proposed explanation of a phenomenon that can be empirically tested to confirm, refine, or refute this explanation.

Scientific method: A process of formulating, testing, and modifying hypotheses.

Segmental vibration: When part of a worker’s body experiences shaking due to contact with the vibration.

Shift work: Work that occurs outside of regular weekday hours.

Short-term exposure value (STEV): The maximum average concentration to which workers can be exposed for a short period.

Sick leave: Paid leave designed to help workers recover from short-term illness or injury.

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs): Workplaces employing between 1 and 99 workers (small enterprises) or between 99–499 workers (medium enterprises).
Social cognition theory: A learning theory that asserts that learning occurs through observation and imitation and thus through formal and informal interactions with others.

Social construction: A phenomenon that is determined (or “constructed”) by social or cultural practices.

Social reproduction: The tasks necessary to ensure that workers are able and available to work each day (e.g., cooking, cleaning, child care, elder care) and over the longer term (e.g., child bearing, education).

Standard employment relationship: Employment characterized by full-time permanent employment with a single employer.

Statistically significant: A result unlikely to have occurred by random chance.

Stop-work order: An order made by a government occupational health and safety inspector that requires work to stop until a workplace hazard is remediated.

Stress: A change in one’s physical and mental state in response to situations perceived as challenging or threatening.

Stressors: Situations or factors causing stress.

Substitution: A form of hazard control that involves replacing something that produces a hazard with something that does not.

Swiss cheese model: A variation of the domino theory of accident analysis which identifies four subfactors (organizational influences, local working conditions, unsafe acts, and defences, barriers, and safeguards) that influence whether an incident occurs or not.

Synergistically: An increase in an effect (e.g., toxicity) caused by two chemicals interacting.

Systemic toxicity: Reaction to a toxic substance at a point in the body other than the point of contact.

Targeted inspections: Identifying specific industries (e.g., residential construction) or working situations (e.g., employers of migrant workers) for additional inspection activity.

Task analysis: Mapping out the flow of work to allow for a systematic examination of how a job is supposed to be conducted.

Technical approach: A way of looking at workplace injury that emphasizes the mechanism(s) of injury.

Telecommuting: An arrangement wherein workers perform work away from the main worksite (e.g., at home).
Temperature homeostasis: Maintaining a core body temperature at about 37 degrees Celsius.

Temporary threshold shift: A temporary loss of hearing following exposure to noise.

Thermal comfort: The condition in which a person wearing normal clothing feels neither too cold nor too warm.

Thermal stress: Stress produced when temperature extremes prevent our bodies from properly self-regulating to maintain temperature homeostasis.

Time-loss injuries: Accepted workers’ compensation claims where a worker could not report to work due to the injury.

Time-weighted average: A measure of loudness that factors in the frequency of the noise.

Time-weighted average exposure value (TWAEV): The maximum average concentration of a chemical in the air for a normal 8-hour working day or 40-hour working week.

Toxic workplaces: Workplaces characterized by relentless demands, extreme pressure, and brutal ruthlessness and representing the extreme of stressful workplace environments.

Toxicity: The ability of a substance to cause injury.

Training: Teaching a worker knowledge, skills, or behaviours with the expectation that the worker will apply that training in ways that reduce the risk of a workplace injury.

Training methods: The strategies and techniques used to meet training objectives.

Training objectives: What the worker is expected to know or be able to do or how they will act as a consequence of the training, often expressed as some level of acceptable post-training performance.

Tripartite consultations: Policy discussions involving representatives of government, employers, and labour.

Undue hardship: The point at which an accommodation is economically unsustainable, interferes with a legitimate operational requirement, or poses a health-and-safety threat.

Vaccination: An administrative control that can reduce worker susceptibility to viruses through inoculation.

Validity: The results of a scientific experiment or observation accurately reflect the real world.
**Vibration:** The oscillating movement of a particle around its stationary reference position.

**Virus:** A group of pathogens that cause disease.

**Vocational rehabilitation benefits:** Programs and other benefits provided by a workers’ compensation board to increase the probability of an injured worker returning to employment.

**Wage-loss benefits:** Benefits paid by a workers’ compensation board to workers whose income is reduced by an injury.

**Walk-through:** A preliminary step in an incident investigation designed to provide a basic overview of the incident and assist investigators to determine what future investigative steps are appropriate.

**Web of rules:** The interlocking set of laws that limit employers’ right to manage.

**Whole-body vibration:** When a worker’s entire body experiences shaking due to contact with the vibration.

**Work hardening:** Providing a worker with the opportunity to gradually return to work (via increasing hours and work demands) in order to build stamina.

**Workers’ compensation:** The system within a jurisdiction providing injured workers with wage-loss, vocational rehabilitation, medical, and fatality benefits.

**Workers’ compensation board:** A government agency established by the legislature of a province or territory that operates that jurisdiction’s workers’ compensation system.

**Working alone:** A situation where a worker is performing tasks out of contact with persons capable of offering assistance in case of emergency.

**Workplace harassment:** Behaviour aimed at an individual (or group) that is belittling or threatening in nature.

**Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS):** A national system that requires the labelling of hazardous materials.

**Workplace hazards:** Any source of potential injury or illness in a workplace, including objects, processes, contexts, people, or sets of circumstances.

**Workplace injury:** Any form of ill health—such as a physical or mental injury or illness—that arises due to a worker’s employment.

**Workplace modification:** Alterations to work processes or the workplace in order to accommodate a worker’s disabilities.
**Workplace safety audits:** An assessment of whether a workplace has an appropriate safety system in place to deal with safety matters.

**Workplace stress:** Stress that is brought on by work-related stressors.

**Workplace violence:** Any act in which a person is abused, threatened, intimidated, or assaulted in his or her employment.

**Workplace wellness programs:** Health and well-being services provided by or through the employer that focus on health promotion and illness prevention.

**Worksite inspections:** An examination of a worksite by a government inspector to ensure compliance with occupational health and safety requirements.