PROTECT THE FUTURE
YOU AND YOUR BABY
Dear Sisters:

Every woman wants to have a pregnancy free of hazards and a happy, healthy baby. Achieving this goal involves care.

You have to protect yourself at work when pregnant or nursing. There are environmental and workplace substances and activities which may harm you, your fetus or your baby. They may even make you infertile.

The purpose of this booklet is to inform you of what harm can occur during pregnancy and how you can protect yourself, your fetus and your baby. It’s important that all women exercise their health and safety rights in the workplace at all times. The need for this vigilance is imperative for women when they are pregnant or nursing.

By protecting your child you protect the future. All of it resides in our children. There is no future without them.

We hope this booklet will help you in the exercise of your health and safety rights in the workplace.

In solidarity,

Buzz Hargrove
President

Jim O’Neil
Secretary-Treasurer
Protect the future
you and your baby
Time and experience have made us familiar with birth defects caused by chemicals.

Female pottery workers, exposed to lead a hundred years ago, had miscarriages, stillbirths or became infertile. Rubella (German measles) was a major cause of birth defects in the 1940s. Thalidomide, which was used as an anti-nausea drug decades ago, also produced birth defects in babies. Ovarian cancer in teenaged girls was traced to the drug DES, which their mothers took during their pregnancies.

There is ample proof that a higher rate of miscarriages and stillbirths occur among wage-earning women than in women who work in the home. The fact that a wage-earning woman is feeling fine is no guarantee that her fetus has not been harmed.

We know that smoking and drinking during pregnancy harm the fetus, even though the mother might not be aware of any ill effects. Avoiding these activities is part of the answer to a healthy pregnancy and a happy baby. You should also insist on not being exposed to second-hand smoke in your workplace.

In regard to chemicals in the workplace, further caution is advised. Besides the ones listed above we suspect that there are other chemicals,
such as phthalates, which are found in some types of plastics and cause reproductive effects or harm the fetus. There are many more we know nothing about because they have not been researched. Your best precaution is to avoid exposure to chemicals you suspect are harmful.

Many harmful chemicals or biological substances enter your body through breathing, swallowing or through the skin. Some chemicals travel through the bloodstream to contaminate your placenta, which is attached to your fetus by the umbilical cord. Other harmful agents affect your overall health and reduce your ability to provide nutrition to your fetus. Radiation can pass directly through your body, harming your eggs and fetus.

Whether you or your baby is harmed depends on how much of the hazard you are exposed to, when you are exposed, how long you are exposed and how you are exposed.

It is important to remember that in the first three months of pregnancy, when the fetus is developing, exposure to extremely small amounts of chemicals can have a large effect. Deformities may occur at birth. Exposure may result in a miscarriage. Years later cancer may occur in the child.

In the last six months of pregnancy exposure to reproductive hazards may produce other dangers. The development of the fetus may be slowed down. The development of its brain may be affected. Premature labour may be induced.

You were born with all the eggs (ova) you will ever have. If your eggs are damaged or destroyed you cannot replace them. You are not given a second chance.

By protecting yourself you protect the future.
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<td>Beryllium</td>
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<td>pregnancy may make symptoms of beryllium poisoning worse and cause death to the woman</td>
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<td>Cancer treatment drugs (eg. methotrexate)</td>
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<td>Carbon disulfide</td>
<td>degreasers, glue makers, paint removers, rubber workers, viscose rayon manufacturers</td>
<td>menstrual irregularities; decreased fertility; miscarriages</td>
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<td>Carbon monoxide</td>
<td>wherever combustion is inadequately ventilated: forklifts, parking garages, foundries, second hand smoke</td>
<td>high levels toxic to fetus due to interference with ability of blood to carry oxygen, may result in decreased birth weight, brain damage</td>
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<td>Hormones (including adrogens, estrogens, progrestogens and synthetic products such as DES)</td>
<td>workers manufacturing synthetic hormones or extracts (eg. birth control pills), including pharmaceutical workers, laboratory workers, farmers and veterinarians</td>
<td>menstrual irregularities; ovarian cysts, breast lumps, cancer of the uterus; birth defects such as abnormalities of the skeletal system, heart, windpipe and sexual abnormalities, such as enlarged breasts, genital and sperm abnormalities in male offspring; DES can cause cancer in female offspring</td>
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<td>Lead</td>
<td>auto manufacturers and recyclers, battery manufacturers and recyclers, bridge repainers, ceramic and pottery makers, electronics workers (solderers), farmers, firing range workers, pesticide makers, paint makers and users, plumbers, radiator repairers, smelter workers, welders</td>
<td>developmental disorders such as mental retardation, infertility, low birth weight, menstrual disorders, chromosome aberrations, miscarriages and stillbirths; contaminates breast milk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mercury</td>
<td>battery manufacturers, ceramic workers, dental technicians, textile workers, makers of fluorescent lamps and recyclers, scientific instrument makers</td>
<td>miscarriages, stillbirths, reduced fertility, fetal exposure, can result in severe brain damage and mental retardation</td>
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<td>Pesticides</td>
<td>agricultural workers, commercial and household gardeners, pesticide manufacturers</td>
<td>chromosomal abnormalities, miscarriages, birth defects</td>
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<td>Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs)</td>
<td>was used as fluid in electrical transformers; old transformers may leak, exposing workers</td>
<td>may affect menstrual cycle, alter sex hormone levels, or cause infertility, may cause birth defects and low birth weight, contaminates breast milk.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vinyl Chloride</td>
<td>workers making vinyl chloride, polyvinyl chloride, and related products</td>
<td>genetic damage to egg; miscarriages, stillbirths, birth defects; cancer in offspring from exposure during pregnancy</td>
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<td>Benzene</td>
<td>laboratory workers, refinery workers; service station workers (benzene is found in gasoline and other solvents)</td>
<td>abnormal menstrual bleeding, bleeding during pregnancy, miscarriage; congenital malformation</td>
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<td>Chlorinated Solvents (eg. Carbon tetrachloride, chloroform, methylene chloride, trichloroethylene, perchloroethylene)</td>
<td>degreasing, dry cleaning, adhesives, coatings, foam plants</td>
<td>carbon tetrachloride can pass through the placenta and cause liver damage in the fetus; chloroform can hinder fetal development</td>
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<td>Glycol Ethers (2-methoxyethanol and 2-ethoxyethanol, also called cellosolves)</td>
<td>workers making or using solvents, paints, adhesives, cleaning products, thinners, etc. containing glycol ethers; electronic and semi-conductor workers</td>
<td>miscarriages; animal studies suggest that glycol ethers may cause birth defects if exposure occurs during pregnancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Solvents</td>
<td>workers making or using solvents for degreasing, cleaning, extraction, or in paints, adhesives, thinners, etc.</td>
<td>various solvents have been linked to adverse reproductive effects in human or animal studies; but it is difficult to isolate the individual substance responsible as many solvents are mixtures. Caution is advised when handling solvents. Many solvents may contaminate breast milk.</td>
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<td>farmers, food servers; workers in pet shops, abattoirs, meat packing plants, health care workers</td>
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<td>Chicken pox (varicella-zoster virus)</td>
<td>health care workers, workers in contact with</td>
<td>prematurity, stillbirth, low birth weight, birth defects including retardation, muscular, skeletal and heart defects</td>
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<td>infants or children</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMV (Cytomegalo-virus)</td>
<td>health care workers, dental workers,</td>
<td>low birth weight, birth defects and developmental disorders including infection leading to jaundice, enlarged spleen and liver, heart, eye and central nervous system damage in newborn</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>laboratory workers, workers in contact with</td>
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<td>Hepatitis B virus (infectious and serum)</td>
<td>health care workers, workers in hostels,</td>
<td>infection leading to miscarriage, prematurity, stillbirth and jaundice, enlarged spleen, increased death rate in newborns, low birth weight</td>
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<td>laundry workers, laboratory workers,</td>
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<td>sterilization unit workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herpes virus hominus</td>
<td>health care workers, laboratory workers,</td>
<td>transmissible genital infections; fetal death, miscarriage, liver and eye diseases, central nervous system damage</td>
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<td>research scientists</td>
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<td>HIV (Human immuno-deficiency virus)</td>
<td>health care workers</td>
<td>low birth weight, childhood cancer</td>
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<td>Human parvovirus B19</td>
<td>health care workers, workers in contact with</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mumps (infectious parotitis)</td>
<td>health care workers, workers in contact with</td>
<td>mumps can inflame the ovaries leading to infertility or sterility, miscarriages, stillbirths, developmental defects, hydrocephalus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>infants and children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rubella (German measles)</td>
<td>health care workers, workers in contact with</td>
<td>low birth weight; placental infection may lead to severe congenital abnormalities, including deafness, blindness, heart defects, mental retardation</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Syphilis</td>
<td>health care workers, laboratory workers</td>
<td>secondary lesions in organs of body, including reproductive organs, infertility or sterility; embryal death, infection leading to liver and spleen enlargement, development defects</td>
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<td>Toxoplasmosis</td>
<td>animal care workers, veterinarians</td>
<td>miscarriage, birth defects, developmental disorders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuberculosis</td>
<td>dairy farm workers, health care workers, laboratory workers, laundry workers, hostel workers</td>
<td>tubercular infections of the reproductive organs; fetus can be infected through blood transfer through the mother or by aspiration of amniotic fluid</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carpal Tunnel Syndrome</td>
<td>assembly line workers, computer operators, retail workers, meat packing plant workers</td>
<td>inflammation of wrist from repetitive work causes pain in median nerve; water retention in pregnancy makes this problem worse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ionizing Radiation (eg. X-Rays, gamma rays)</td>
<td>health care workers, dental technicians, lab technicians, atomic workers</td>
<td>infertility; miscarriage, stillbirths, gene mutations, direct damage to fetus, such as death, mental retardation, birth defects, and increased incidence of childhood cancer, such as leukaemia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ionizing radiation (eg. microwaves)</td>
<td>food service workers, health care workers, flight attendants and pilots, radio, navigation and radar communication workers</td>
<td>changes in menstrual cycle; miscarriages; retarded fetal development, birth defects, such as club foot and Down's Syndrome, decreased lactation in nursing mothers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Heat, cold

Noise and vibration

Strenuous physical labour such as heavy lifting, repetitive lifting of more than 10 kg., handling heavy loads, frequent bending/stretching, prolonged standing (more than 3 hours per shift) or sitting in same position

**PSYCHO-SOCIAL**

Stress

**OCCUPATIONAL EXPOSURE**

fishers, workers in bakeries, canneries, fish plants, laundries, factories, foundries, smelters

machine and motor vehicle operators; miners, airline workers; assembly line workers, riveters, pneumatic drill operators

many types of work, including but not limited to material handling, factory work, health care, hospitality, retail

**EFFECT ON WOMAN OR FETUS**

decreased fertility, increased embryo death, low birth weight

congestion of the veins (eg. varicose veins), especially during menstruation and pregnancy; menstrual cycle disturbances, reduced fertility, increased premature births, abnormal labour, and perinatal mortality; exposure to high noise levels during pregnancy may cause hearing loss in child.

increased susceptibility to hypertension, varicose veins, hemorrhoids, backache and tiredness; vaginal bleeding; premature birth, miscarriage late in pregnancy, retarded growth

miscarriages, drug and alcohol abuse; marital breakdown, strained relations with children; hormonal imbalance; loss of sex drive
Developmental Disorders

Sometimes the brain of the fetus does not develop normally, leading to developmental delays or learning disabilities later in life. Such problems are often not noticeable at birth. Later they may appear as hyperactivity, a short attention span, a reduced learning ability or, in severe cases, mental retardation.

Childhood Cancer

Pregnant women exposed to ionizing radiation (X-rays, gamma radiation) may give birth to children who develop cancer. Consequently, current medical practice minimizes the use of X-rays on pregnant women. Newer and more frequently tested equipment reduces the risk of exposure. Likewise the use of protective shields decreases the likelihood of harmful exposure to the fetus.

As mentioned earlier, we know that pregnant women who use the drug DES can give birth to daughters with ovarian cancer. But the relation between a pregnant woman’s exposure to other chemicals and childhood cancers has not been adequately researched.

Noise

Exposure to excessive noise during pregnancy can cause hearing damage in the fetus. The use of hearing protection at work is of no benefit to the fetus as it is not similarly protected. Avoid excessive noise.
Lifting

Pregnant women are at greatest risk of physical injury during their third trimester, when their abdomens are at greatest size. Due to the increased size of their abdomens any object lifted or carried is further away from their lower backs than is safe. Their lower backs are subject to unusual stress.

A woman lifting a 4.5 kg object close to her body has about 29.5 kg of pressure on her lower back. A pregnant woman in her third trimester lifting the same weight has 68 kg of stress on her lower back.

During the later stages of pregnancy the lower back’s curve increases. Its muscles have to work harder to keep a woman’s balance or to help her stand.

Electromagnetic Fields (EMFs)

What you can’t see can hurt you.

EMFs are invisible lines of force which occur when electricity is conducted. They are composed of an electric and a magnetic field. When equipment is plugged in, turned on or off electric fields are present. Magnetic fields are present only when equipment is turned on. While electric fields can be blocked, magnetic fields cannot. The electromagnetic fields of concern from computer monitors, known as Video Display Terminals (VDTs), are of two kinds: very low frequencies (VLFs) and extremely low frequencies (ELFs).

There is still some doubt about the risk involved for a pregnant woman exposed to EMFs. So far, studies have not been well designed and are inconclusive. However, we do know that human and animal studies link EMFs to an increase of various cancers, such as leukaemia, male breast cancer and brain cancer. The CAW recommends precaution in the presence of EMFs, as follows.

Sit at arm’s length from a computer (70 cm) and about 1.2 metres away from the backs and sides of co-workers’ monitors. EMFs fall off with distance. The magnetic parts of the fields are not blocked by baffles or walls.

Take regular breaks from computer work to reduce exposure.

Radiation-reducing glare screens or shields reduce the electric component of the EMFs. But don’t use a shield that distorts the image on the monitor.

Turn off the computer when it is not in use.

Do not use a lead apron.
PROTECT YOURSELF
PREVENTION IS THE KEY
Avoid Exposure

Your first duty is to avoid exposure to chemical, biological or physical agents. They can produce ill effects even in non-pregnant workers.

Safe substitutes for chemical agents should be used in workplaces. Certain types of exposure can be reduced through engineering controls, such as exhaust ventilation. As a last resort, personal protective equipment can be used to reduce exposure.

Some biological agents come in the form of diseases, like hepatitis B, mumps, German measles, chicken pox and parvovirus B19. Workers at risk should be vaccinated against them. If you have not been immunized by earlier exposure to these diseases avoid contact with infected children or adults.

If you work in health care, employ universal precautions: wear protective gloves and dispose of needles safely. Wear low allergen latex gloves and, if you’re allergic to latex, other types of gloves.

- always wear gloves in procedures that may involve contact with blood or biological fluids
- always wear a gown, mask and protective goggles in any situation where there is a risk of splattering from blood or body fluids
- wash your hands often, especially before and after contact with blood and body fluids
- soiled laundry should be deposited in a leak-tight, air-tight bag
- contaminated surfaces should be disinfected with bleach
- spills must be cleaned up by workers trained in safe procedures
- use special devices for mouth to mouth resuscitation
- treat all blood and body fluids from all people as potentially infectious

If you work in an elementary school, nursery school or daycare centre you must wash your hands frequently. This simple precaution helps prevent the spread of infectious diseases.

Ergonomic Solutions

You can be exposed to physical agents through poor design of your workplace, heavy lifting or continuous standing. Protect yourself through the principles of ergonomics. This means changing the workplace to suit the worker. Also recommend changes to work organization which will make your work safer, not only more comfortable.
Workstations should be adjustable to reduce awkward postures and to accommodate changing bodies. Jobs which require a lot of sitting may produce lower back pain. A proper chair should be used for such jobs with a supporting lower back rest and a foot rest. Workstations should be adjustable, so work can be performed either sitting or standing and with frequent changes in posture.

Pregnant women should walk in moderation. Walking helps prevent minor swelling of the ankles, as leg veins pump blood upwards from the feet. Prolonged sitting and standing are also leading risk factors in pregnancy. When sitting, avoid the firm edge of the seat. It can obstruct leg veins and produce blood clots.

Work Organization Solutions
Avoid or limit the following:
➲ physically strenuous work
➲ work requiring balance
➲ heavy lifting
➲ loud noise
➲ shift work
➲ long working hours
➲ unadjustable work stations
➲ prolonged sitting
➲ prolonged standing
KNOWLEDGE IS THE KEY
YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW
Your Right To Know

Are you exposed to harmful chemicals in your workplace? If you don’t know, find out. You have the right to know about workplace hazards in every Canadian province and within the federal jurisdiction. The Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) is the law in all jurisdictions. It requires an employer to provide the following:

➲ labelling of harmful chemicals in the workplace
➲ MSDSs (Material Safety Data Sheets) which give detailed information.

Read them thoroughly. If you have questions, take them to your health and safety committee representative or your doctor. You can also contact the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) or an occupational health clinic for further information. (See contact information at the end of the booklet.)

Important Words Used in MSDSs

Carcinogen: something that causes cancer.
Mutagen: something that damages (mutates) genes of living cells.
Teratogen: something that damages the fetus.

➲ education and training of workers. This must be developed in consultation with members of your CAW health and safety committee.

Your Right to Refuse

In every province and in the federal jurisdiction you have the right to refuse unsafe work. Since your fetus is part of your body you have the right to refuse work which may endanger it.

You must inform your supervisor and a member of the CAW health and safety committee when you exercise your right to refuse. If a safety representative is unavailable, inform another union representative. Stand in a safe place and make sure you have input while the supervisor and your representative investigate the situation. If they disagree about suitable protective measures, a government health and safety inspector must investigate the situation.

Your employer cannot discipline you for exercising your right to refuse.
Your Right to Privacy

You are not obliged to tell your employer that you are pregnant. However, if you want to be reassigned to another job you must have your doctor’s written opinion of your job restrictions.

Protective Reassignment: Quebec law is best

Currently the province of Quebec has the best legislation protecting women. It requires your employer to assign you to a safe job while you are pregnant or nursing.

You are entitled to protective reassignment as soon as you provide a medical certificate which says that working conditions endanger your pregnancy or nursing child. While your employer is considering your reassignment you must be paid. If the employer cannot find a safe job immediately, you are entitled to workers’ compensation benefits. And your employer must continue to provide your benefits.

All of these protections continue until you are reassigned to a safe job, give birth (in which case you are entitled to Employment Insurance benefits), or your child is weaned from breast-feeding. After your child is born and has finished nursing your employer must return you to your previous job.

We must lobby for similar protective legislation in the rest of Canada.

Federal Jurisdiction: New rights for Pregnant and Nursing Employees

Effective as of September 30, 2000, the Canada Labour Code, Section 132 of Part 2, provides for your right to refuse unsafe work to protect yourself and your fetus. The CAW was part of the labour caucus which negotiated this new provision for women workers in the federal jurisdiction.

Section 132 (1 to 5) allows an employee to cease performing her job if her doctor says that it may endanger her health or the health of her fetus or child. The employee may be reassigned by her employer to another, safer job. She will continue to receive all wages and benefits which came with her former job while performing the substitute job.
Your Collective Agreement Can Give You Protective Reassignment Rights

Your CAW Collective Agreement can provide rights to protective reassignment, as well as benefits, including time loss benefits, when you are off work due to pregnancy or nursing.

The collective agreement between CAW Local 112 and Bombadier DeHavilland provides the following on protective reassignment:

“24.03 Any employee who becomes pregnant while employed by the Company and is unable to continue in her classification because of chemical or biological agents in her area will, upon recommendation of her physician and confirmation by the Company physician, be employed in other work on a job that is operating in the plant without regard to any seniority provisions of the Collective Agreement, except that such employee may not displace an employee with longer seniority. The above exceptions shall be made by agreement between the Company and the Bargaining Committee.

During the time period that she is employed in this new classification, she will not attain vested seniority for the purpose of future bumping, but will continue to accrue plant-wide seniority.

Such employee will return to her original classification upon termination of her Maternity Leave of Absence, consistent with her seniority.”

Fight Discrimination

Your employer is obliged by law to protect your health and safety. Make sure your employer solves health and safety problems and does not discriminate against women by excluding or removing them from the workplace. This discriminatory practice is the simplest solution for the employer, but it is the least satisfactory from the workers’ point of view.
Men’s Reproductive Systems Are At Risk

Many occupational health hazards which affect women’s reproductive systems also affect men’s reproductive systems. Examples include lead, heat and radiation. It takes two to create a new life. Removal of reproductive hazards protects both men and women.

Although the information in this booklet is by no means comprehensive about workplace hazards to pregnant and nursing women, we hope that it has raised your awareness and will encourage you to exercise care and caution.

By protecting your child you protect the future. All of it resides in our children. There is no future without them.
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Occupational Health Clinics—MANITOBA
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Fax: 204.956.0848

Information
Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS)
250 Main Street East
Hamilton, ON L8N 1H6
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Tel: 1.800.263.8466
Fax: 905.572.4500
Web: www.ccohs.ca
E-mail: inquiries@ccohs.ca

Alberta Workers Health Centre
10451 - 170 Street NW, Room 111
Edmonton, AB T5P 4T2
Tel: 780.486.9009
Tel: 1.800.661.6053
Fax: 780.483.7632
Web: www.workershealthcentre.ca
E-mail: info@workershealthcentre.ca

London Occupational Safety and Health Information Service (LOSH)
#222 - 424 Wellington Street
London, ON N6A 3P3
Tel: 519.433.4156
Fax: 519.433.2887
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E-mail: losh@execulink.com

Toronto Workers’ Health and Safety Legal Clinic
#201 - 180 Dundas Street West
Toronto, ON M5G 1Z8
Tel: 416.971.8832
Fax: 416.971.8834
E-mail: work@olap.org

Windsor Occupational Health Information Service (WOHIS)
547 Victoria Avenue
Windsor, ON N9A 4N1
Tel: 519.254.5157
Fax: 519.254.4192
Web: www.mnsi.net/~wohis/
E-mail: wohis@mnsi.net

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Web: www.whsc.on.ca
E-mail: alan@whsc.on.ca

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LAMP
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Tel: 1.800.263.8466
Fax: 905.572.4500
Web: www.ccohs.ca
E-mail: inquiries@ccohs.ca

Alberta Workers Health Centre
10451 - 170 Street NW, Room 111
Edmonton, AB T5P 4T2
Tel: 780.486.9009
Tel: 1.800.661.6053
Fax: 780.483.7632
Web: www.workershealthcentre.ca
E-mail: info@workershealthcentre.ca

London Occupational Safety and Health Information Service (LOSH)
#222 - 424 Wellington Street
London, ON N6A 3P3
Tel: 519.433.4156
Fax: 519.433.2887
Web: www.execulink.com/~losh/main.htm
E-mail: losh@execulink.com

Toronto Workers’ Health and Safety Legal Clinic
#201 - 180 Dundas Street West
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