

WorkSafeBC Policy and Regulation Division e-Newsletter

# Insight



## Studying safety: New research identifies gaps in OHS training

It's back-to-school season in British Columbia and time for many students to hit the books and further their education, building knowledge that will help them reach their career goals. But are they also learning the skills to keep themselves and others safe and healthy at work? With a grant from Research Services, [Vernon Curran](#) set out to answer that question.



"I was approached by a colleague about the idea of studying the current landscape of occupational health and safety programming at the post-secondary education level in Canada," Curran says. "I had actually completed a certificate in OHS many years ago and had responsibility for organizing education and training for government staff at that time, so this was a good fit with my interests and expertise."

### Surveying the landscape

The study included a review of current scientific knowledge on the topic, a web-based workshop with key stakeholders, a scan of existing occupational health and safety (OHS) education and training offered through Canadian universities and colleges, and [an online survey](#) about OHS educational programming for health professionals.

The research focused on the current state of formal OHS education and awareness within organizations and industries, challenges in accessing relevant education, and strengths and gaps in knowledge, skills, and attitudes of OHS professionals that could be enhanced through formal educational programming.

The findings reveal that the majority of formal OHS training in Canada is available through certificate and diploma programs. Most OHS education

and training is offered at the college level, largely through distance learning and part-time study, and is designed for individuals working as or seeking employment as OHS professionals with primary responsibility for coordinating and managing OHS programs. Only a small number of university degree programs were identified that provide advanced preparation for OHS practitioners working in research, policy, and key leadership roles.

As little OHS education and training is offered through universities in professional program areas such as nursing, business, and engineering, some graduates of those programs may be entering the Canadian workforce with no real understanding of fundamental concepts of occupational health and safety. This could have significant implications for both employers and workers.

### **Future directions**

"My hope is that the results of the study will highlight gaps or limitations in the existing range and scope of OHS education and training in Canada, and that as a result we may see development of new programs at the university level," explains Curran.

Future work could also focus on specific human resources needs of different industries in Canada, he concludes. "Given the importance of OHS programs and policy for worker safety, there would appear to be a need for more advanced programs that prepare individuals for positions in policy, leadership, and research."



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