

LABOUR MARKET NEWS

Government of Alberta ■

Fort McMurray • Wood Buffalo



Putting safety first

Many rewarding career options in workplace health and safety

Safety at work is no accident. Just ask Simon McCrady.

He's the health, safety and environment (HSE) director for the Fort McKay Group of Companies. The business has more than 400 employees in the region working in areas such as oil sands grounds maintenance, heavy equipment operation and truck driving.

McCrady leads a team of six HSE professionals who work hard to make sure all employees get home safe.

“At the end of the day, it’s rewarding when there are no workplace safety incidents, and everybody gets to go home to their families with all their fingers and toes attached,” says McCrady.

Workplace safety is a growing priority for companies in the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo region.

This has opened up many new career opportunities for occupational health and safety advisors (NOC 2263).

They develop—and put into action—workplace health and safety programs at local businesses.

“Companies can’t afford fines for injured workers or the cost of lost production. Safety gives a good return on investment,” says Robin Kotyk, chief operating officer for the Alberta Construction Safety Association (ACSA).

Not only that, but companies realize they have a moral obligation to ensure worksites are safe—for their employees, for the public and for the environment. “Companies have said, ‘We need to go farther to make sure

worksites are safe and there are zero injuries,’” says Darryl Hass, vice president of Western Canadian HSE operations for ConocoPhillips, which runs an oil sands processing site south of Fort McMurray.

When it comes to getting a job as a safety advisor, experience and training count. Look inside this issue of the *Labour Market News* to learn more about careers in safety and to find out what skills employers are looking for.



Safety advisors develop workplace health and safety programs to keep workers, the public and the environment safe.

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This publication has been prepared by Alberta Employment and Immigration.

Where is the work?

Safety advisors work in many industries across the region, from oil and gas and construction to manufacturing, forestry and transportation.

Most advisors work directly for a company in their safety department. Larger companies often have a team of safety advisors on staff, while smaller companies may employ only one or two safety advisors.

How can I get my foot in the door?

When it comes to starting a career as a safety advisor, having at least a few years of related work experience is important. It doesn't matter what industry you want to work in. Employers want people who have field experience and an understanding of their industry, their operations, and how things work in the field.

“When we put out a call for safety people, we get a ton of resumé’s,” says McCrady. “Many candidates think they’re qualified to be a safety advisor when the only courses they have are CSTS (Construction



Safety personnel may spend much of their day in the field, talking with workers about safe work practices.

Tips for finding safety jobs

- ➔ Look in the Yellow Pages under Contractors or Safety Consultants to find information on local companies who may employ health and safety staff.
- ➔ Go online. Many employers post their job opportunities on their company websites. You can find a list of potential local employers online at woodbuffalo.net/linksEMPLIntro.html.
- ➔ The Alberta Construction Safety Association has an online job board at acsa-safety.org.
- ➔ The Board of Registered Canadian Safety Professionals has an online job board at bcrsp.ca/careers.asp.
- ➔ Check the career pages or help wanted section of the *Fort McMurray Today* newspaper (fortmcmurraytoday.com).
- ➔ Other online job boards include:
 - jobbank.gc.ca
 - fortmcmurrayonline.com
 - jobs.alberta.ca
 - workopolis.com
 - safetycodes.ab.ca
 - monster.ca

Safety Training System) and OSSA (Oil Sands Safety Association). That’s not acceptable. You need to have more than that.”

For example, in the construction industry, safety advisors often start as labourers and work their way up into junior safety positions. After three years, they can take the National Construction Safety Officer (NCSO) certification through ACSA and move into a safety role (this is the minimum educational training most Alberta construction companies require for safety advisors). Companies often help pay for training courses.

In manufacturing, safety advisors may have experience on the production line. In oil and gas, safety advisors often have experience working on drilling or

service rigs or mining operations. Hass, with ConocoPhillips, says there are many reasons industry experience is so important for safety advisors.

“You need to have a reasonable understanding of what the risks are of the work being done,” says Hass. “It builds credibility with the frontline workers who are out there doing the work, day to day. You can really speak knowledgeably to workers, to say, ‘I’ve been there, I’ve done that.’”

Angela Bester, manager of health and safety with Surespan Construction, got her start working in office administration before moving into safety.

“The company vice president asked me to be the company safety

Average wages in Alberta

NOC 2263: Inspectors in public environmental health and occupational health and safety (includes occupational health and safety advisor and occupational health and safety officer).



Average starting wage per hour:

\$28.93

Overall average wage per hour:

\$34.05

Source: 2007 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey (alis.alberta.ca)

person. I think a lot of women have found their direction in safety from a similar experience, although not 100 per cent,” says Bester.

People with a background in other safety careers, such as paramedics or safety watch technicians (an entry-level job providing hands-on safety in industrial facilities) may also move into safety advisor roles with enough work experience under their belts.

Those with trades tickets or some form of post-secondary technical training are also well-suited to move into a safety advisor role. “We will also hire people who have some post secondary education, often in a technical field from SAIT, NAIT or Keyano College, backed up by occupational health and safety training,” says Hass.

Another way to gain some basic experience is to join your company’s safety committee.

Training options: How to pick the right path

With some field experience on your resumé, the next step is to get some formal safety training. There are many options, from short courses and certificates to post-secondary schooling. Different employers, in different industries, look for different levels of training. If you’re not sure where to start, call an employer or someone working in the safety field and ask them for advice.

“I would talk to somebody who is in the field right away, just to get a better idea of what direction you want to go in,” says Bester. “You really have to do your research and make sure this sort of job is for you. There’s a lot of stress involved, but it’s very, very rewarding in the end.”

See the sidebar (above right) for some formal training options. Besides formal safety training, many employers require a high school diploma, or equivalent.

TRAINING OPTIONS IN ALBERTA

ALBERTA CONSTRUCTION SAFETY ASSOCIATION (ACSA)

ACSA offers various safety training certifications including:

- ➔ **Health and Safety Administrator (HSA)** — Provides training in health and safety management skills and principles. Geared for health and safety administrators who have less than three years construction field experience.
- ➔ **National Construction Safety Officer (NCSO)** — Combines formal training with an individual’s field experience. Students must have at least three years field experience in the construction industry.

For more information on ACSA certification, go online to acsa-safety.org or call the Fort McMurray office at 780-715-2157.

KEYANO COLLEGE

The University of Alberta’s **Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)** certificate program is available through Keyano College (keyano.ca). Classes are held in Fort McMurray. The program is part-time and takes about 2.5 to three years to complete. It is geared towards people already working in occupational health and safety, as well as people who are interested in getting into this line of work. Call 780-791-4858 for details.

MANUFACTURERS’ HEALTH AND SAFETY ASSOCIATION

The **Manufacturing Safety Officer (MSO)** certificate combines formal training with an individual’s personal work experience. It is focused on the manufacturing sector. Go online to mhsa.ab.ca/programs/mso.html for details.

ALBERTA ASSOCIATION OF SAFETY PARTNERSHIPS

The **Qualified Safety Representative (QSR)** designation provides students with an in-depth understanding of safety responsibilities and managing an effective safety system. Go online to safetypartnershipsaaasp.com for details.

SAFETY CODES COUNCIL

The council provides training and certification for safety codes officers in nine disciplines (for example, building safety or fire safety). Safety codes officers need related education and work experience in the particular discipline to qualify. Go online to safetycodes.ab.ca for details.

NAIT

NAIT, in Edmonton, offers a two-year **Occupational Health and Safety** diploma, as well as a Occupational Health and Safety Leadership Certificate through Continuing Education (offered on weekends). Go online to nait.ca for details.

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY CONTINUING EDUCATION

Students of the **Health, Safety and Environment** certificate program can choose general studies, or specialize in either safety, occupational health or the environment. Go online to conted.ucalgary.ca for details.

NOTE: People with NCSO, MSO or QSR certification can receive credit from the University of Alberta towards the Occupational Health and Safety Certificate program.



What to expect on the job

Job duties can vary greatly from employer to employer, but there are some common tasks performed by safety advisors. They include:

- ➔ training new and existing employees on safe work procedures
- ➔ ensuring company safety programs are being followed
- ➔ conducting safety courses



- ➔ conducting company-wide safety meetings
- ➔ conducting or assisting with “tool box talks” at work sites
- ➔ evaluating work sites for potential safety hazards
- ➔ reviewing and developing health and safety initiatives, policies and procedures
- ➔ developing emergency plans
- ➔ developing environmental management plans
- ➔ performing safety audits
- ➔ writing and filing reports
- ➔ investigating accidents.

A typical work day

Safety advisors often spend much of their day in the field, throwing on their coveralls and safety gear and visiting work sites.

This could include everything from mining or construction sites to drilling rigs, workshops or manufacturing facilities. Work sites can be remote, so travel may be required.

The rest of their time is usually spent in an office, doing paperwork or developing safety programs.

“ There’s a lot of stress involved, but it’s very, very rewarding in the end. ”

- Angela Bester
Health and safety manager
Surespan Construction



In larger companies, safety advisors may be more specialized, either working in the field or in the office.

Hours of work vary for safety advisors. Some field positions require 10 to 12 hour shifts. Other safety advisors work regular office hours. They may also be on-call for emergencies.

Skills you’ll need

In order to work as a safety advisor, certain skills are needed to do the job well. At the top of the list is good communication skills—being able to talk to people, and knowing when to listen.

“A lot of people come into safety with the attitude that they’re safety cops,” says McCrady. “But you have to work together with other staff. Within the company, everybody has to work together to accomplish safety.”

The challenge for safety advisors is creating a safety culture at work. This means inspiring workers to make safety a top priority—not because they have to, but because they want to.

“You have to sell safety to people. A lot of workers have the attitude ‘I’ve been doing this for 20 years

WORKING FOR GOVERNMENT: SAFETY OFFICERS

- While most safety professionals in the region work for private industry, there are also opportunities to work in the public sector.
- Occupational health and safety officers (NOC 2263) are employed by municipal, provincial and federal governments.
- Their job is to visit places of employment to detect unsafe or unhealthy work conditions. They also ensure laws and regulations that govern workplace safety are being followed.
- Workplace Health and Safety, a provincial government department under Alberta Employment and Immigration, employs three safety officers and a lead investigator in Fort McMurray. The team inspects work places to ensure companies are following occupational health and safety legislation. They may investigate workplace incidents or respond to complaints. Much of their job is also visiting worksites to help educate employers and workers about safety at work.
- The ability to communicate effectively, with everyone—from frontline workers to company executives—is key for safety officers.
- “You’re dealing with the public all the time. You’re enforcing legislation, but the approach that we take is collaborative. We try and get employers to understand why it’s important to follow legislation

and see the benefits of workplace safety,” says regional manager Chris Powell.

Safety officers are often out of the office, visiting worksites. Writing reports is another important aspect to the job.

Because of the variety of industries they work in, each day brings something different. “That’s the beauty of the job. Today they might be at an oil sands company, tomorrow they’re at a fast food restaurant, the next day they’re doing an inspection at a golf course,” says Powell.

Education and experience is necessary

To work for government as a safety officer, several years of related work experience is required. A two-year diploma or a four-year degree from a post-secondary school, usually in a science or technical field, is also needed. Having a professional designation, such as Canadian Registered Safety Professional (bcrcsp.ca), is an asset.



TIP

What's in a name?

Safety advisor is just one job title that employers use to recruit safety staff. Recent job postings in the Fort McMurray area had job titles such as: field or site safety coordinator, OH&S (occupational health and safety) officer, HSE administrator or safety specialist, to name a few.

and we've never had a problem.' So good people skills are very important," says McCrady.

Safety advisors should also feel comfortable talking in front of people, from field crews and sub-contractors to supervisors and top executives, but this is something that can be learned over time.

"Quite often you'll have to get up in front of crowds. It could be 10 people or 100. You need to be comfortable speaking in front of that group and speak with enough conviction to get your message through," says Hass.

It's important for safety advisors to be non-confrontational and open to ideas from other employees.

"Just because you have an idea in your head about how something should be doesn't mean it's the right way," says McCrady. "Pay attention to the people who know how to do the job and learn from them. Get their cooperation."

Safety advisors shouldn't just walk around job sites quoting government regulations, adds Bester. "You should also provide

solutions on how to make things safer," she says. "You need to have flexibility in order to help people see the bigger picture."

Other skills employers look for include:

- ➔ ability to work with diverse groups of people
- ➔ ability to motivate and encourage a positive attitude towards safety
- ➔ excellent problem solving skills
- ➔ ability to work in a fast-paced environment
- ➔ detail and results oriented
- ➔ organized
- ➔ good record keeping and reporting skills
- ➔ computer skills
- ➔ time management skills.

Other job requirements

Because safety advisors visit worksites regularly, they must have a valid driver's licence and clean driving record.

Many companies also require employees to pass drug and alcohol testing.

A rewarding career choice

Hass got into safety because he cares about people and wants to make sure people are safe at work. This is what motivates most safety advisors to do their job.

"It's so fulfilling because I'll go home at the end of today and I'll know that no one got hurt on our watch, and I'll be real proud of that," he says.



RELATED CAREERS:

SAFETY CODES OFFICER (NOC 2264):

Safety codes officers inspect the construction, installation and maintenance of structures and systems to ensure compliance with relevant codes, standards and regulations. They include:

- ➔ Building safety codes officers
- ➔ Electrical safety codes officers
- ➔ Plumbing and gas safety codes officers
- ➔ Boiler and pressure vessel safety codes officers
- ➔ Fire safety codes officers

Safety codes officers are employed by municipal governments, such as the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (woodbuffalo.ab.ca). They also work for accredited agencies and corporations that provide compliance monitoring services.

Safety codes officers need a combination of work experience and related training (such as a journeyman trades ticket). They must also be certified by the Safety Codes Council. For full details, go online to safetycodes.ab.ca.

According to the 2007 Alberta Wage and Salary Survey, safety codes officers earn an average hourly wage of \$25.41.

OCCUPATIONAL HYGIENIST (NOC 4161):

Occupational hygienists identify, evaluate and implement controls to reduce or eliminate workplace health hazards. They suggest changes to work environments and processes to reduce the risk of injury or illness from occupational hazards. They work for industrial plants, such as oil sands plants, in addition to governments, consulting firms, public utilities, insurance companies, hospitals, labour unions and educational/research institutions.

The minimum academic requirement for an occupational hygienist is a four-year university degree related to occupational hygiene (in environmental, physical, chemical or health science, or engineering).

The average salary in 2005 was \$61,500 a year (more recent data is not available).

For more information on these careers, go online to Alberta Learning Information Services (alis.alberta.ca) and click on OCCinfo for occupational profiles.



How to keep yourself safe at work

Safety at work is everyone's responsibility. Employers have a responsibility to provide a safe and healthy workplace. Workers also have responsibilities. They include:

- ➔ working safely and co-operating with the employer by following health and safety rules on the job
- ➔ using safety and personal protective equipment
- ➔ taking part in safety training, including Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) training
- ➔ reporting unsafe working conditions to the employer or supervisor.

If you have concerns about workplace health and safety, talk to your supervisor. If you still aren't satisfied, speak to your supervisor's boss. If the situation still doesn't change or improve, call Workplace Health and Safety at 1-866-415-8690 (toll-free within Alberta).

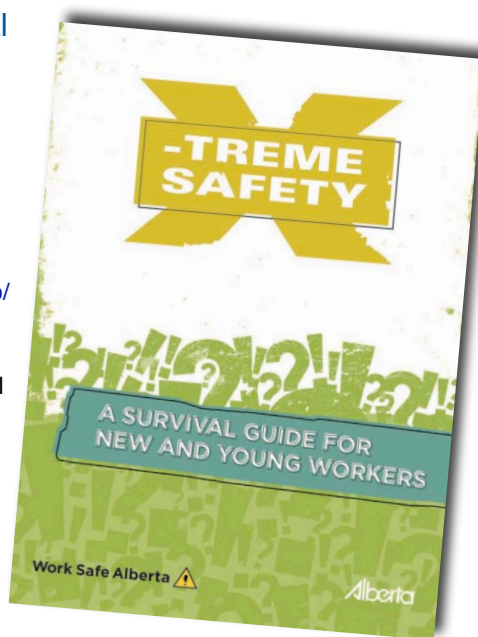
To find out more about how to keep yourself safe at work, go online. There are several websites with helpful information including:

- ➔ Government of Alberta Workplace Health and Safety (employment.alberta.ca/SFW/53.html)
- ➔ Government of Alberta Employment Standards (employment.alberta.ca/SFW/1224.html)
- ➔ Work Safe Alberta Information Sharing Network (employment.alberta.ca/whs/network/)
- ➔ bloodylucky.ca
- ➔ jobsafetyskills.com
- ➔ safecanada.ca

X-Treme Safety: A Survival Guide for New and Young Workers

If you're under 25, you're one-third more likely to be injured on the job. Find out the hazards in your workplace, then learn how to stay healthy and safe.

Go online (alis.alberta.ca/pdf/cshop/xtremesafety.pdf) to read *X-Treme Safety: A Survival Guide for New and Young Workers*. It includes real life stories from real people who were injured at work. You can also get free copies in Alberta by calling the Alberta Career Information Hotline or (1-800-661-3753) or by visiting the Labour Market Information Centre in Fort McMurray (9915 Franklin Avenue).



For information on resources and career decisions in Fort McMurray, contact us at:

Wood Buffalo Labour Market Information
780-715-0222

Email: info@woodbuffalo.net

Online: www.woodbuffalo.net
employment.alberta.ca

Alberta Employment and Immigration career and employment services

Fort McMurray

Wood Buffalo Labour Market Information
Ph. 780-715-0222
info@woodbuffalo.net

Canada-Alberta Service Centre
Labour Market Information Centre
Provincial Building, 9915 Franklin Avenue
Ph. 780-743-7192, employment.alberta.ca

Other career/employment services

Fort McMurray

Fort McMurray Association for Community Living - CHOICES Employment Services
10010 Franklin Avenue, Ph. 780-791-3355
www.fmacl.ca

YMCA - Youth Connections
(in-school services only)
Ph. 780-791-7520

YMCA – Immigrant Employment Services
#201, 10011 Franklin Avenue
Ph. 780-791-1115 www.ymca.woodbuffalo.org

Franco Job
312 Abasand Drive, Centre Communautaire Scolaire, Boréal, Ph. 780-791-9779
www.acfawoodbuffalo.ab.ca

Athabasca Tribal Council Employment
9206 McCormick Drive Ph. 780-791-7445
www.atc97.org/employment

Keyano College Career Employment Services Ph. 780-799-1589 www.keyano.ca

Métis Employment Services
Ph. 1-888-486-3847, www.albertametis.ca

Career Planning Services
Toll free: 1-866-776-7773, www.olcconsulting.ca

Fort McKay

Fort McKay First Nation Employment & Training Office
Ph. 780-828-2430, www.fortmckay.com

Conklin

Conklin Employment Services
Nakewin Centre, Conklin, Ph. 780-559-8995

Employment and Training

Aboriginal Mine Works Program
www.aboriginalmineworks.ca

Aboriginal Apprenticeship Initiative
Ph. 780-747-6500
(previously Aboriginal Apprenticeship Project)

Immigrant services

YMCA – Immigrant Settlement Services
#201, 10011 Franklin Avenue
Ph. 780-743-2970, www.ymca.woodbuffalo.org