



Low-cost, High-return: Health and Safety Strategies for Auto Collision and Repair Shops

Paints, fillers, solvents, dust from sanding, metal fumes, repetitive movements and awkward postures—all familiar hazards within the auto collision and repair industry.

What distinguishes you from your competition is that you're invested in protecting your workers, contractors and clients, at the same time as you improve productivity and reduce costs. It's not a zero-sum game, as you already know, or you wouldn't be here looking for information.

You've come to the right place. Here's what you need to know.

Ministry of Labour applies new criteria for blitzing workplaces

The MOL is changing its approach to safety blitzes. Traditionally, MOL inspectors visited firms based on a list provided by the WSIB that ranked organizations by their number of lost-time injuries. Now, inspectors have broadened their scope to include all workplaces within an industry known to have high-profile hazards that expose employees to serious harm. In addition, inspectors may target organizations based on information they've gleaned from the community about workplaces known to be out of compliance.

A benefit to legitimate businesses of this wider and more intuitive approach to inspections, is it will expose auto collision and repair shops that are operating illegally in Ontario, taking advantage of vulnerable workers, and polluting the environment.

Auto collision and repair shops brace for special MOL blitz this summer

In keeping with the new approach, MOL inspectors will make a broad sweep of auto collision and repair shops in central Ontario—from Oakville, to Oshawa, and up to Barrie—starting in July 2009. The blitz will run for six months, instead of the usual four weeks. You will be expected to demonstrate that you're in compliance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act—regardless of the size of your business. What's more, MOL inspectors will follow up in 2010 to make sure improvements have been sustained.

Hope for the carrot: If the MOL targets you for an inspection, you want to hope you're one of the lucky ones who is notified by OSSA. This means you're being offered a “carrot”—an opportunity to work voluntarily and collaboratively with OSSA to build on the positive things you may already be doing to protect your employees from risks in your workplace.

Prepare for the stick: If, however, your notification comes directly from the MOL, it means you could be facing MOL orders. And if MOL inspectors have already arrived unannounced at your door, the two most important things you can do are, cooperate fully and implement the required fix, fast. See “Don't walk this road alone,” below.

Special Alert!

What you need to know about isocyanates and WHMIS

The nature of your industry requires your employees to work daily with hazardous substances that could be extraordinarily dangerous if not controlled properly. The Occupational Health and Safety Act sets out clear requirements for employers around performing assessments and putting control programs in place.

Isocyanates are chemicals commonly found in products used in auto-body repair—so highly toxic that they have been named a “designated substance” under the Act and are subject to special regulations and controls.

WHMIS is a Canada-wide regulation that affects all businesses, and a critical component of your workplace-specific training program for all staff.

If you haven't done an assessment to assess your risks...if you don't have an effective control program in place...if you haven't provided training to your staff so they can protect themselves when safely handling these substances...then you have put your workers at risk, jeopardized your reputation and bottom line, and guaranteed MOL orders during an inspection of your workplace.

OSSA can help you with all your requirements related to hazardous substances, including assessments, program development and training. Find out where you excel and what you need to do to close any gaps.

Don't walk this road alone

OSSA is a not-for-profit health and safety association authorized by the WSIB to provide a wealth of health and safety expertise through its programs, training, products and tools to Ontario's service sector, including the auto collision and repair industry. You won't find another not-for-profit, private or government organization like it. OSSA is a trusted health and safety service advisor in business for the sole purpose of helping your staff become healthier and safer. Many of the services OSSA provides won't cost you a dime—their coaching and advice is paid for by provincial funding—and their confidential services are not shared with the MOL or WSIB.

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