

BULLETIN

New regulations in effect April 15

May 1, 1998

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by RACHEL NOTLEY

April 15, 1998 was the culmination of over five years of work by labouractivists committed to improving health and safety for BC workers. That's because the first major revision of BC's health and safety regulation since 1970 came into effect on that day and workers can now rely on the enhanced health and safety protection provided through the new regulations.

New protections for workers

The amendments are far-reaching and affect workers in a broad cross-section of industries across the province. HSA members, along with other healthcare workers, will enjoy new and enhanced protections in several areas.

Limits now exist on the degree to which the employer can require workers to work alone. Although it is not prohibited, requirements are now in place for regular communication with isolated workers. Basic ergonomic, lighting, and indoor air quality standards must be met by the employer.

Tobacco smoke at the workplace is prohibited unless it is outside or in a room that functions on a different ventilation system than the rest of the building. Although currently exempted, long term care facilities, restaurants, bars and games rooms will be covered by the regulation as of January 1, 2000.

Toxic chemical hazards

In the area of toxic chemical hazards, new substances have been added to the prohibited list and the allowable levels of a number of substances have been reduced.

The employer is now obligated to monitor the contamination levels of certain high risk workplaces (many HSA workplaces would be covered by this section of the regulation) on a regular basis and to develop an exposure control plan. New standards have been put in place with respect to ventilation. The specific handling of cytotoxic drugs is also much more strictly regulated. Finally, although labour activists were unsuccessful in achieving more authoritative language, the new regulation at least requires the employer to develop a policy "which may include protective re-assignment" to protect pregnant and sensitized workers.

Your role in OH&S

The above noted changes, combined with last year's new regulation of bloodborne pathogens and the four year old violence regulation (which, unfortunately, remains uncomplied with in the majority of workplaces notwithstanding the fact that it has been in place for several years) have increased the employer's health and safety obligations in the workplace. It is up to you, in concert with your Health and Safety Steward

and committee, to monitor your workplace and ensure these standards are met.

HSA will be mailing out copies of the new regulations to each Chief Steward and each Safety Steward. For more information on the new regulation or on any other health and safety issue, contact the wcb/Health and Safety Labour Relations Officer at HSA.

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