

# New Audit of Alberta's OHS System Finds Some Improvements But Also Flaws



In April 2010, Alberta's Auditor General released a scathing report on Alberta's Department of Labour, which assessed how the department promotes, monitors, enforces and reports on its OHS goals and objectives. That report contained various recommendations on improvements to the OHS system.

On July 5, 2016, the Auditor General released a new report on follow-up audits done on three outstanding recommendations from its April 2010 report, recommendations that the department:

1. Promote and enforce compliance with the law
2. Evaluate and report on whether its programs achieved the desired results
3. Obtain assurance over the work of auditors, who issue certificates of recognition (CORs).

The auditors found that, in the six years since the original audit, the department has made a number of recommended improvements to OHS systems, including:

- Obtaining assurance that CORs are properly issued and maintained
- Implementing controls over the quality of data in its computer system
- Improving its processes to identify high-risk employers
- Beginning to issue fines, tickets and administrative penalties to employers and workers who continue to break the OHS law.

But the department still doesn't regularly evaluate and report on whether the programs it uses to improve workplace health and safety achieve set goals and objectives. For example, the department has abandoned multiple attempts to complete a Work Safe Alberta strategy, instead using the work previously completed on the strategy to guide the development of workplace OHS programs.

The lack of evaluation and reporting on OHS programs means that the government can't assure residents that such programs are achieving desired results and providing value to Albertans.

In addition, the department lacks effective systems to document required managerial approval to give employers additional time to fix workplace problems.

Some department staff gave employers multiple time extensions to fix problems, contrary to departmental operating procedures.

In short, the audit concluded that the department is unable to demonstrate, with evidence, that it has a complete set of processes to apply department policies to keep Alberta's workers safe.