

# The Glenn Commandments: How U.S. Tariffs Will Impact Your OHS Program



For all the talk in the Canadian media about the Trump tariffs, something important is being overlooked – namely the tariffs’ practical impact on Canadian workplaces and operations. I get that tariffs are going to bring hard times, layoffs, fewer workers putting in longer hours, and all that. But what does all of this mean to you, the person responsible for running your company’s OHS program? There are, I believe, 5 adjustments you’re going to have to make to keep workers safe and healthy in times of tariffs.

## 1. Review & Revise Your Current Hazard Assessments

U.S. tariffs will force companies to cut costs. That may result in not only staff reductions but also changes to basic operations. Tools, equipment, materials, work methods and locations—just about anything and everything will be on the table.

**What To Do:** Review your most recent [hazard assessments](#) and determine if they need to be updated for post-tariff conditions. Thus, for example, hazard assessments for operations to be carried out by 4 workers will need to be revised if they’re now going to be performed by only 3

people.

## 2. Ensure Current Safety Measures Work for Post-Tariff Hazards

The hazard assessment is the brain and spinal cord of the OHS program. It's only after you identify and evaluate the dangers that lurk in your workplace that you can determine how best to manage them. **Result:** Any tariff-related adjustments you make to your hazard assessments may have ripple effects on your safety measures.

**What To Do:** After revising your hazard assessments, determine whether your current engineering controls, work policies and procedures, training, PPE, etc., are still going to be effective. If not, you'll need to make adjustments to the new state of hazards.

## 3. Double Down on Efforts to Protect Workers from Stress, Fatigue & Burnout

Tariffs will cause workers to experience enormous pressure, angst, and anxiety. Two of 5 Canadian workers say that they're afraid of losing their jobs due to the tariffs, according to a recent survey. Workplace fatigue will also take a larger toll as companies press the workers who do keep their jobs to work longer, harder, and more productively for the same or lower pay.

**What To Do:** [Persuade company execs](#) to make preservation of workers' mental health a priority during these troubled times. Take active measures like [implementing a Workplace Fatigue Risk Management System](#) and using pulse surveys to evaluate current stress levels and workers' overall mental wellbeing.

## 4. Prevent Anti-American Harassment in the Workplace

The new animus against Trump and the U.S. may have a virulent effect on your workplace, especially if you have American workers who become the target of threats or hostile comments based on their nationality. Such behaviour, even if intended as a joke, may create a toxic work environment and lead to national origin discrimination or harassment complaints.

**What To Do:** Ensure you have a robust [workplace harassment prevention program](#) in place that includes mechanisms for reporting and investigating harassment complaints.

## 5. Resist PPE & Other Safety Budget Cuts

U.S. and Chinese tariffs may impede global supply chains and drive up the prices of respirators, protective eyewear, gloves, high-visibility apparel, etc. This might make it tempting for companies to defer or cancel planned purchases of PPE or buy cheaper, less effective equipment.

**What To Do:** As OHS coordinator, you must make the business case against PPE and other [safety budget cuts](#). Point out that in addition to increasing workers' risk of injuries and illnesses, cutting corners on PPE can increase the company's risk of liability for violating [PPE requirements under OHS laws](#). One great source of ammunition that a CFO is likely to respect is a study from 3M demonstrating a direct link between a company's PPE expenditures and its work injury and illness rates ("PPE matters: A report on attitudes towards Personal Protective Equipment in the construction industry," 3M, February 2009).