

Why Canadian OHS Duties Follow Remote and Field Workers Wherever They Work



For many Canadian employers, the workplace is no longer one building, one site, or one controlled environment. It may be a home office in Burnaby, a service truck outside Red Deer, a client site in Mississauga, a forestry road in northern British Columbia, a sales route across Atlantic Canada, or a technician working alone after hours in a customer's facility. That shift creates a compliance problem because traditional OHS systems were built around visible workplaces. Supervisors could walk the floor, JHSC members could inspect the premises, workers could report hazards in person, and emergency procedures were tied to a fixed location.

Distributed work breaks that model, but it doesn't remove the employer's duty. Under federal OHS law, the Canada Labour Code Part II requires employers to ensure that the health and safety at work of every person employed by the employer is protected. Federal guidance also confirms that the workplace includes any place where an employee is engaged in work for the employer, which makes telework and remote work part of the OHS conversation. ([Canada](#))

That principle is broader than federal jurisdiction. Across Canada, the legal question usually isn't whether the employer owns the place where the work occurs. The better question is whether the worker is performing work for the employer and

whether the employer had a reasonable ability to identify, assess, and control the risk. Once a worker is performing assigned work, the employer needs a system that follows the work, not just the office.

Remote work and field work are different risk profiles

Employers often group remote and field workers together. That can be useful administratively, but it's risky from an OHS standpoint because a home-based employee working on a laptop faces very different hazards than a utility technician working alone, a community support worker visiting private homes, a sales representative driving between appointments, or a construction supervisor moving between multi-employer worksites.

For teleworkers, the key risks often involve ergonomics, work organization, hours of work, fatigue, isolation, psychosocial hazards, emergency communication, and the boundary between work and home. CCOHS advises that duties, expectations, and deadlines should be clearly outlined between supervisor and teleworker, and warns that extended periods in the same body position or repeated motions can contribute to musculoskeletal injuries. ([CCOHS](#))

For field workers, the risks may include driving, working alone or in isolation, violence, weather, fatigue, unfamiliar premises, animals, hazardous substances, mobile equipment, contractor coordination, communication gaps, and delayed emergency response. A single "remote work policy" won't control all of that. The employer needs risk profiles by role, task, location, and exposure, not just by whether the worker is away from the office.

Jurisdiction can become complicated quickly

Distributed work also raises jurisdictional issues. A Canadian employer may have workers in several provinces, federally regulated employees, contractors working at client sites, or workers temporarily assigned outside their normal jurisdiction. The first compliance mistake is assuming that the employer's head office rules automatically answer every OHS question. They don't.

Provincial and territorial OHS legislation generally applies based on where the work is performed, subject to federal jurisdiction and specific statutory rules. Federally regulated employers operate under the Canada Labour Code Part II, but even they must understand how local site rules, client requirements, workers' compensation rules, and emergency response obligations interact with their work. This matters because requirements for working alone, first aid, violence prevention, incident notification, committee structures, inspections, training records, and reporting timelines can differ by jurisdiction.

A field worker based in Alberta who performs work in British Columbia may trigger different expectations than a worker who never leaves Alberta. A technician sent to a client site may need to follow both the employer's procedures and the site owner's safety rules. A remote worker who relocates to another province may create questions about workers' compensation coverage, OHS jurisdiction, employment standards, privacy, and tax administration. The legal answer may vary by situation, but the management principle is consistent: employers need to know where their workers are working, what work they're performing, which rules apply, and who is supervising the risk.

Supervision has to be designed, not assumed

Supervision is one of the hardest parts of distributed OHS compliance. Ontario's Ministry of Labour describes a supervisor under the Occupational Health and Safety Act as a person who has charge of a workplace or authority over a worker. ([Ontario](#)) That definition is useful because it focuses on authority and control, not physical proximity. A supervisor doesn't stop having safety responsibilities just because the worker is out of sight.

The employer should define what supervision means for each remote or field role. For a home-based administrative worker, it may involve ergonomic self-assessments, workload check-ins, working-hours review, mental health support, and a clear process for reporting discomfort or hazards. For a lone field technician, it may involve pre-job hazard assessment, travel planning, scheduled check-ins, emergency escalation, verification of competency, and clear stop-work authority.

Good supervision asks what could go wrong while the worker is away from direct observation and how the employer will know before it becomes serious. That question is especially important where workers work alone or in isolation. WorkSafeBC describes working alone or in isolation requirements as including identifying and minimizing hazards and regularly checking on workers' well-being. ([WorkSafeBC](#)) That's a practical standard for employers across Canada, even though the legal wording differs by jurisdiction.

Reporting systems must travel with the worker

Distributed workers need a reporting system they can actually use. A policy that says "report hazards to your supervisor" is not enough if the worker is in a truck, on a client site, in a

remote location, or working outside normal business hours. The system should make it clear how the worker reports a hazard, near miss, injury, violence risk, equipment issue, or unsafe site condition; who receives the report; how quickly serious issues must be escalated; what happens if the worker can't reach the supervisor; and how the report is documented and followed up.

CCOHS states that workers should report actual or potential health and safety hazards immediately and shouldn't wait for an inspection team or an injury. ([CCOHS](#)) That principle becomes even more important when the worker is physically separated from the employer's workplace. If the worker sees a serious hazard at a client site, experiences a threatening interaction, develops discomfort from a home workstation, or encounters unsafe travel conditions, the employer needs a practical way to receive and act on that information.

A remote reporting process should be simple and accessible, whether it uses phone, app, form, emergency contact, supervisor intake, or another method. It should also distinguish between routine reporting and urgent escalation. A poor chair at a home workstation and a violent threat at a client site are both OHS issues, but they don't require the same response. The system should make that distinction easy for the worker and the supervisor.

The employer still needs evidence

The compliance test isn't whether the employer cared about remote and field workers. It's whether the employer can prove it had a system. That means documentation. Remote work agreements, ergonomic guidance, hazard assessments, working-alone procedures, check-in records, travel safety expectations, field-level risk assessments, incident reports, corrective actions, training records, supervisor notes, JHSC review, and emergency response plans may all become relevant after an incident.

This evidence matters because distributed work creates an investigation challenge. If a worker is injured away from the employer's physical site, the employer may need to reconstruct what happened with limited direct observation. Good records make that possible. Poor records leave the employer trying to explain a safety system that exists mostly in memory.

Canadian employers should stop treating remote and field work as exceptions to the OHS system. They're now part of the system. A defensible approach starts by mapping where work occurs, identifying which laws and site rules may apply, classifying hazards by role, defining supervision expectations, establishing practical reporting channels, creating working-alone and emergency response procedures, and ensuring the JHSC or representative receives meaningful information about distributed work risks. The workplace may be everywhere now, but the employer's duty still follows the work.