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ALBERTA GOVERNMENT RECONSIDERS OHS ENFORCEMENT AFTER AUDITOR GENERAL'S CRITIQUE

Area of Coverage - [Occupational Health and Safety](#)

Amendments to Alberta OHS legal regime came into effect in 2002; the revolutionary OHS Code in 2004. Given that it took some time for first charges under the new regime to be laid, this test of the government's efforts to make Alberta safer is some 4½ years old. So, how are they doing? Well, according to the just-issued Auditor General's report, Alberta's occupational safety department isn't doing enough to reel in 'high-risk' companies, companies who 'repeatedly flout safety rules'. For example, stop work orders were lifted even though no safety improvements had been made, there were inadequate criteria for selecting companies to be inspected. Over a five-month period in 2007 and 2008, the Auditor General reviewed nearly 4,000 compliance orders and found 109 orders for 63 employers had not been followed. Those employers had an injury rate three to four times the provincial average.

While the report has focused on the Province's health and safety establishment, the Government's response will involve the public. Employment and Immigration Minister Thomas Lukaszuk has pledged to act on the Auditor General's recommendations that the department enforce existing rules and hold its own safety offenders accountable, but also to do more. As reported in the press, the Minister plans to implement changes to safety policies in the coming weeks and months. Part of this will involve a review of the Certificate of Recognition (COR) program since, as the Minister put it, "employers who are non-compliant should not qualify for COR". Further, talk of 'outing' employers who consistently violate safety rules has also been resurrected. Although threatened every few years, this time the Minister is looking at how to get around privacy issues so that workers can find out if their employers are safe or not. Rather than just being a 'walk of shame', the Minister promises that "it will provide a list of not just the bad guys, so to speak, but all employers."

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