HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDE

Conducting psychosocial hazard surveys in your workplace



Workplace surveys gather evidence about the health and safety conditions our members face every day. When done properly, surveys can identify both risk factors and organizational strengths.

To measure psychological health and safety conditions, CUPE uses the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ). The survey allows data to be kept on our own platform and servers.

This guide provides health and safety committees and CUPE locals with information about running the COPSOQ survey.

Understanding your role

Health and safety committees have the legal authority to investigate workplace hazards. This includes hazards that affect mental health.

A survey conducted by a health and safety committee isn't research. It's hazard identification and assessment, which is a core function of health and safety committees under most occupational health and safety legislation.

Employer support

Some employers argue that psychological health and safety isn't the health and safety committee's responsibility and may not agree to a joint survey. If the employer won't agree to the health and safety committee running the survey, the local can run the survey without the employer's support. Just make sure members fill it out away from work and on their own time.

Whether the survey is conducted with the employer or without them, the following steps can help ensure the results provide useful information.

Running a survey

When running a survey, it's important to take the time to:

1. Define your purpose
2. Establish a communication plan
3. Designate survey champions
4. Test the survey
5. Plan the launch
6. Analyze the results
7. Create an action plan
8. Follow up

1 Define your purpose

Be clear about what you want to measure. Ask:

- What specific psychosocial hazards are we investigating?
- Are we responding to member complaints about a particular issue?
- Do we want to compare conditions across different departments or shifts?
- Are we assessing the impact of recent workplace changes?

Clear objectives will determine your survey approach. Discuss your objectives thoroughly with your union health and safety committee and affected members.

2 Establish a communication plan

To begin, decide how you're going to let members know about the survey. Think about the most effective ways to reach them. Emails, phone calls, bulletin boards and announcements at union meetings are all possibilities. Use a variety of outreach methods and schedule follow-ups in advance.

Before launching your survey, clearly announce what's coming and why it matters for member safety. Explain how the results will be used to address workplace hazards and address confidentiality concerns directly and honestly. Emphasize that you're seeking honest feedback to drive real improvements in working conditions.

Send clear initial instructions with the survey launch. During the survey period, send reminders without overwhelming members. Designate survey champions to promote participation and answer questions.

If the employer has agreed to the survey, make it clear that completing the survey is part of regular work duties, not something to be done during breaks or personal time. Address barriers to participation as they arise, like technical issues or scheduling conflicts.

After the survey closes, share the results with members. Explain what actions the committee plans to take based on the findings, along with timelines and next steps. Members who provide feedback but never hear about outcomes are less likely to participate in future safety initiatives.

3 Designate survey champions

Survey champions are union members who can promote participation, answer questions and provide trusted information about the survey.

When the employer supports the survey, champions can reinforce that completing it is part of regular work duties. If the survey is being conducted without the support of the employer, these activities may be prohibited during working hours.

Champions should build participation though personal outreach rather than excessive reminders. The committee or local should designate enough champions to support the size of the local.

4 Test the survey

Test your survey with a small, diverse group of members before launching it. A test can identify confusing questions, technical problems, missing hazards and unintended interpretations that could skew your results.

Ask test participants what was unclear, what seemed irrelevant to their work and what workplace stressors might be missing. This is particularly important for sensitive topics like mental health and workplace stress, as unclear questions can produce unreliable data or even cause distress among respondents.

5 Plan the launch

Allow enough time for thoughtful completion. Two to three weeks is typically appropriate for psychosocial assessments that require reflection.

Avoid busy periods like budget deadlines, major organizational events or holidays. Consider shift patterns and work schedules so all members have an equal opportunity to participate.

If you have employer support, ensure that surveys can be completed during work time rather than breaks or personal time. Tell members how long the survey will actually take to complete and address any technical requirements or access issues upfront. This prevents frustration and ensures members can participate fully.

6 Analyze the results

Once data collection is complete, identify the most common and serious psychosocial hazards affecting your members. Look for patterns across departments, shifts or job classifications that may reveal specific risk factors.

Whenever possible, compare your results to established benchmarks or previous assessments to understand whether conditions are getting better or worse.

7 Create an action plan

Assessment without action can damage trust and make future surveys more difficult.

An action plan should include:

- specific interventions to address identified hazards
- clear timelines and responsibilities
- success metrics to measure improvement
- a communication plan to keep members informed about progress

Addressing psychosocial hazards often requires sustained effort and ongoing evaluation. Focus on one or two changes at a time so they can be implemented effectively before moving on to others.

8 Follow up

Psychosocial hazard assessments are not a one-time event. Plan follow-up surveys to measure whether changes are effective, identify hazards that may have arisen due to those changes and maintain member engagement in health and safety.

Need help?

CUPE health and safety specialists can provide support and guidance. Contact them when:

- Survey results reveal complex patterns requiring specialized analysis
- Identified hazards require interventions beyond the committee's capacity
- Legal or policy questions arise about psychosocial hazard management
- Members report serious mental health impacts requiring immediate attention

Remember—you're not expected to solve every problem alone. Your role is to identify hazards systematically and advocate for appropriate solutions through legislation, your collective agreement and organizational policies.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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