

Conducting psychosocial hazard surveys in your workplace



Workplace surveys are powerful tools that help to gather evidence about the psychological health and safety conditions that our members face daily. When done properly, these assessments reveal both risk factors and organizational strengths we can build upon. These assessments are frequently performed using psychosocial hazard assessment survey tools.

There are currently two survey tools CUPE recommends:

- StressAssess
- Guarding Minds@Work

Both tools allow for users to set up free surveys and provide advice and guidance for using their tools. This fact sheet provides CUPE locals and health and safety committee members with some additional information that they should consider when determining if they want to run a survey.

Understanding your role

Health and Safety committees have the legal authority to investigate workplace hazards. This includes workplace hazards affecting our member's mental health.

It is important to remember that by running a survey, a health and safety committee is not conducting research—they are performing a hazard identification and assessment, which is a core function of health and safety committees under most occupational health and safety legislation.

Employer support

Many employers continue to argue that worrying about psychological health and safety is not the work of the committee, and do not agree to this type of joint analysis. If the employer will not agree to the health and safety committee performing the analysis, the local can run the survey without the support of the employer (just make sure to have members fill it out away from work and on their own time). Regardless of whether you are jointly collecting data or the union has to do the survey on its own, the following advice can assist in assuring that you have useful information to present.

Running a survey

Before launching a survey, it is important to take the time to:

- Define your purpose
- Establish a communication plan
- Determine how you will review data

Before you start: Define your purpose

While the health and safety committee will likely have a good idea of the purpose of the survey before launching it, it is important to understand what you want to measure. Ask yourself:

- 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?

The precision of your objectives will determine everything else about your survey approach. Take time to discuss this thoroughly with your local union committee and affected members.

Communication plan

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.

During the active survey period, send clear initial instructions with the survey launch, followed by thoughtful reminders that don't overwhelm members. It is a good idea to establish a 'survey champion' who can help to ensure people are aware of and feel comfortable completing the survey. When the employer has agreed to the survey, make it explicitly clear that completing the survey is part of regular work duties, not something to be done during breaks or personal time. Address any barriers to participation as they arise, whether technical issues or scheduling conflicts.

After completion, sharing results becomes critical for maintaining trust. Share findings with members who participated—this builds credibility for future assessments. Explain what actions the committee plans to take based on the findings and be transparent about timelines and next steps. Members who take time to provide feedback but never hear about outcomes are less likely to participate in future safety initiatives.

Identify champions

To help promote and ensure participation, it is a good idea to designate survey champions within the workplace. These are members of the union who can reach out to other members letting them know about the survey, the importance of completion, and can serve as a trusted source of information if members have questions or concerns. When working with employer support, champions can reinforce that survey completion 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.

Most importantly, champions help maintain momentum throughout the survey period with personal outreach rather than overwhelming members with excessive reminders. The committee or local should ensure that there are adequate champions to do this work (relative to the size of the membership).

Test before you launch

Always test your survey with a small, diverse group of members first. This testing phase identifies confusing or unclear questions, technical problems with survey delivery, missing aspects of psychosocial hazards, and unintended interpretations that could skew your results. Actively seek feedback from your pilot participants about what didn't make sense, what seemed irrelevant to their workplace experience, and what important workplace stressors might be missing from your assessment. This step is particularly important when addressing sensitive topics related to mental health and workplace stress, as unclear questions can produce unreliable data or even cause distress among respondents.

Launch strategically

Allow sufficient time for thoughtful completion—typically 2-3 weeks is appropriate for psychosocial assessments that require reflection. Avoid busy periods like budget deadlines, major organizational events, or holiday seasons when members may be distracted or stressed. Consider shift patterns and work schedules to ensure all members have equal opportunity to participate, regardless of when they work.

Setting clear expectations from the start improves participation rates and data quality. If you have employer buy in, ensure that surveys can be completed on work time, and are not something to be squeezed into breaks or personal time. Provide realistic estimates of how long completion will take and address any technical requirements or access issues upfront. This prevents frustration and ensures members can participate fully.

Analyze and act on results

Once data collection is complete, focus your analysis on actionable findings that can drive real workplace improvements. Identify the most prevalent and severe psychosocial hazards affecting your members and look for patterns across departments, shifts, or job classifications that might reveal specific risk factors. Where possible, compare your results to established benchmarks or previous assessments to understand whether conditions are improving or deteriorating.

Use the data to plan changes

Assessment without corresponding action doesn't improve member safety—it can actually damage trust and make future surveys more difficult. Your action plan should include specific interventions to address identified hazards, clear timelines and responsibilities for implementation, success metrics to measure improvement, and a communication plan to keep members informed about progress. Remember that addressing psychosocial hazards often requires sustained effort and ongoing evaluation to achieve meaningful change over lengthy periods of time. It is recommended that the local/committee focus on one or two changes at a time to ensure that they get them right before moving on.

Follow up and continuous improvement

Psychosocial hazard assessments are not a one-time event. Plan follow-up surveys to measure the effectiveness of change, to identify new or emerging hazards that may have arisen due to the implementation of controls, and to help maintain member engagement in safety processes.

When to seek additional support

CUPE National Health and Safety Specialists can help provide support and guidance to this process. Consider bringing in external expertise 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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