

HEALTH AND SAFETY MATTERS

Promoting a Positive Health and Safety Environment
Red Deer Public Schools



Good Day Team

Happy New Year everybody, hoping your holiday season went very well. I cannot believe that it is 2025, my my but the time does fly. Lets all make 2025 the best year ever.

The core principles of workplace safety will remain steadfast, so it's not quite "out with the old, in with the new." Yet, staying safe isn't just about maintaining the status quo— each new year introduces unique challenges that demand our vigilance.



1. Make Extreme Weather Preparedness Second Nature

Flooding, wildfires, hurricanes, intense heat, landslides, and severe storms were frequent visitors in 2024.

Current trends indicate that these extreme events will strike even harder in 2025. Preparing now could save lives, protect workplaces, and ensure smoother operations when nature does its worst.

You likely already know the main culprits in our area. But what about the lesser-known threats? Ignoring these emerging risks could leave your organization vulnerable. For instance, areas not historically prone to flooding may now face rising water levels due to shifting climate patterns.

2. Know That the Next "Achoo!" Could Be Bird Flu

Post-pandemic fatigue from coronavirus has muted the alarm signals for H5N1 Avian Influenza, popularly known as bird flu. It may be flying under the radar, but animal-to-human transmission has been recorded from Oahu to Vancouver and has a fatality rate of 50%. There have yet to be any signs of human-to-human transmission.

So be sure to maintain best practices from that time so your team doesn't get rusty. Encourage handwashing and enhance cleaning protocols by disinfecting shared surfaces in the workplace. Lastly, encourage your employees to eat healthily and exercise regularly.

3. Keep Experienced Employees on Their Feet (by Preventing Aging-Related Incidents)

There's no way around it: we're all getting older this year. This inevitable march of time applies to our teams as well. The data shows that the share of older employees has increased across industries. Aging teams have a wealth of experience to draw from and are often highly engaged in their work. But to better support these employees, we need to prepare for physical challenges unique to this subset of workers.

Aging is risky business. As our bodies mature, our balance decreases, which increases our risk of slips and falls. Encourage employees of all ages to take a proactive approach to their health by getting regular health screenings to identify potential issues early. Implementing these measures not only enhances safety but also demonstrates a commitment to valuing experienced employees.

4. Become a Mental Health MVP by Championing Employee Well-Being

Mental health challenges have been on the rise. Nearly one in five adults experience a mental health condition each year. Why that's the case is up for debate, but it's likely a combination of heightened societal stressors and lowered stigma around mental health. In 2025, we can expect mental health support to be a critical objective for maintaining teams' overall health.

Besides encouraging employees to live healthy lifestyles and make use of any mental health services that may be offered, employers should do their best to create a supportive culture. Mental health issues can be subtle and difficult to recognize, especially in the workplace, so the best thing that employers can do is create close relationships with their reports and regularly check in with them.

Doing your part to create a culture of resilience in the workplace can be a great tool for building resilience and protecting employees from burnout. These efforts contribute to higher employee satisfaction, lower turnover rates, and a reputation as a company that genuinely cares for its people. Mental health symptoms will likely affect at least one member of your team this year, so taking proactive steps now will ensure employees remain productive, motivated, and engaged during 2025.

5. Defend Against Data Breaches, One Click at a Time

Digital systems are now the beating heart of most organizations' processes. They've made our workplaces more efficient and safer, but they also come with a host of dangers. One key concern often overlooked is how data breaches can physically endanger workers. Cyberattacks can cause machinery to malfunction, safety monitoring systems to fail, and create general disruption and chaos.

To address these escalating threats, employers must prioritize cybersecurity as much as physical safety protocols. Employers can strengthen their systems by implementing advanced firewalls, regular systems updates, and real-time monitoring to detect breaches early. Taking steps to minimize the impact of breaches is a smart idea as well, so be sure to encrypt sensitive information and maintain regular data backups. And since cybersecurity awareness at all levels is critical, make sure employees are roped into these precautions too. Ensure that they have strong password hygiene and are savvy to phishing attempts.

The operational disruptions caused by compromised systems can be very hazardous. Investing in cybersecurity in 2025 isn't just about protecting systems—it's about protecting people.

Better Safe Than Sorry

It's impossible to predict every danger, but taking a proactive stance toward emerging risks can protect everyone on the team. When push comes to shove, employers will be glad they took precautionary measures.

Deconstructed egg roles

Ingredients

1 tablespoon olive or vegetable oil	1 pound ground pork (any ground meat will do)
1 medium yellow onion, diced	1/2 teaspoon salt
Freshly ground black pepper	3 cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon minced peeled fresh ginger	1 (14-ounce) bag coleslaw mix
2 tablespoons soy sauce	1/4 cup thinly sliced scallions
1 teaspoon toasted (Asian) sesame oil	1 teaspoon rice vinegar

Instructions

Heat the oil in a large frying pan over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add the pork and onion, and season with the salt and pepper. Cook, breaking up the meat into small pieces with a wooden spoon, until the meat is cooked through and the onion is tender, about 8 minutes.

Add the garlic and ginger and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the coleslaw mix and soy sauce and cook, stirring occasionally, until the cabbage is crisp-tender, about 3 minutes. Remove from the heat, add the scallions, sesame oil, and vinegar, and stir to combine. Taste and season with salt and pepper as needed.

Dealing with Winter Cold

Winter does not just bring snow and cold temperatures, it also brings enjoyable winter activities such as skiing, ice skating, snowmobiling, sledding, ice fishing, snowshoeing and fat biking. While these activities create lasting winter memories, they also have the potential to cause injury.

It is important for everyone enjoying the outdoors to know how to recognize when someone has been exposed to cold for too long, prevent cold-related emergencies, and be able to provide help when needed.

Prevention

- Cover your head and trunk by wearing a hat and layers of tightly woven fabrics such as wool or synthetics.
- Cover up exposed areas such as your fingers, cheeks, ears, and nose.
- If your clothes get wet when you are in the cold, change into dry clothes as soon as possible.
- Drink plenty of warm fluids to help your body stay warm and hydrated, avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Eat high calorie food and drinks regularly as the body converts food to energy which heats the body.
- Dress in layers so that you can adjust to changes as you heat up or cool off.
- Bring additional warm clothing when going out for extended periods or in case of emergency.
- Don't wear tight fitting clothing or footwear that may impair circulation.
- Seek shelter from the wind if you are getting cold, even if it is only behind a tree, hill, embankment, or other landscape feature.

Recognizing when someone is suffering from a cold-related emergency

Frostbite

Frostbite is a serious condition in which body tissues freeze. It happens most often in the fingers, toes, ears, and nose.

There are two levels of frostbite: Superficial frostbite occurs when the skin freezes but the underlying tissues are unaffected. It may produce clear blisters after the tissue thaws, but little or no tissue loss typically occurs. Deep frostbite occurs when tissues beneath the skin (including tendons, muscles, and blood vessels) freeze. Inside the body, ice crystals and swelling begin to damage or destroy the body's cells, blood vessels, and nerves. Deep frostbite may produce dark, hemorrhagic blisters when the tissue thaws, and is more likely to result in tissue loss.

Before frostbite occurs, a person's skin may appear shiny and rosy (a condition sometimes called "frost nip"). This is a warning that frostbite is imminent. If you see these signs, move to a warmer environment or protect the skin with layers of clothing.

Signs and symptoms of superficial frostbite include:

- Hardened skin
- Skin that looks paler than the area around it
- Pain or stinging in the area, followed by numbness

Signs and symptoms of deep frostbite include:

- Waxy skin that is colder than the area around it
- Skin and underlying tissue that is hard and solid to the touch
- Skin that is white, blue, black, or mottled
- Complete loss of feeling

Hypothermia

When a person is exposed to cold temperatures it may result in a decrease in body temperature, which is called a cold-related emergency. Hypothermia can happen to anyone who is exposed to cold temperatures for too long, and it can be life threatening.

Mild hypothermia – Shivering and complaining of cold, numbness in fingers and toes, body temperature slightly below normal.

Moderate hypothermia – Shivering, numbness in fingers and toes, lack of coordination and/or speech, confused or unusual behavior, impaired judgment.

Severe – Person has stopped shivering and complaining of cold, lack of coordination and/or speech, confused or unusual behavior, impaired judgment, glassy stare, body temperature below 30°C, breathing has slowed down or stopped, possible unconsciousness.

How to help

- Call EMS/9-1-1 for severe hypothermia.
- Treat the person gently and monitor breathing carefully.
- Get the person away from the cold and into shelter.
- Remove any wet clothing and gently pat dry the person.
- Warm the person by wrapping him or her in blankets or putting on dry clothing. Cover the head and neck. Warm the person slowly.
- If hot water bottles or heating pads are available put them under armpits and on the chest only, being careful not to burn these areas.
- Do not rub areas that appear to be affected by frostbite.
- If the person is alert, give him or her sips of warm liquids to drink.
- Active re-warming such as hot baths should be used only when the person is far from a medical facility.
- Keep the affected areas warm to prevent re-freezing.

