

Elements of an Occupational Healthcare Program

An Occupational Healthcare Program (OHCP) is a critical element of a safety and occupational health management system (SOHMS). OHCPs focus on the prevention, early detection, diagnosis, and treatment of occupational injuries and illnesses. This one pager reviews the elements of an OHCP.



HEALTHFUL WORKFORCE

Organizations implementing an SOHMS must ensure resources are available to provide effective occupational health (OH) services. Organizations without internal OH staff, such as physicians, OH nurses, audiologists, and health technicians, will need to secure external OH services. OH staff coordinate with safety and health (S&H) personnel to anticipate, identify, and manage hazardous conditions and health risks to effectively maintain a healthful workforce.

EXAMINATIONS

Monitoring employee health is one function of the OHCP. OH covers the full spectrum of work-related medical examinations, including pre-placement exams, medical surveillance, medical certification, and exit examinations. Through these examinations, OH professionals ensure employees are fit for duty, monitor employees' health status during employment, determine the need for work adjustments, and document the status of workers' health at termination of employment. Examinations are vital, especially in work environments where stressors such as physical (e.g., noise, temperature, radiation), chemical, biological, and ergonomic hazards exist.

DIAGNOSES AND MEDICAL TREATMENT

OH personnel work with Industrial Hygiene (IH) and S&H staff to evaluate and diagnose employees exposed to health hazards. When necessary, OH professionals conduct special surveillance examinations to determine if employees need removed from the workplace to prevent further exposure.

Review your organization's process to send ambulatory employees to a medical facility or private doctor for evaluation and medical care if your OH staff cannot treat injured employees. Additionally, verify that emergency procedures and services are in place for first response, emergency care, and ambulance transportation to emergency facilities.

CASE MANAGEMENT

Case management provides various services to support employees from the time an employee experiences an injury or illness until the employee returns to work. Effective case management includes comprehensive written policies. These policies require employees to immediately report unhealthful conditions, injuries, and symptoms of illnesses. Your policies must also include your return-to-work process. Collaboration between OH, IH, S&H staff helps your organization maintain accurate documentation (e.g., medical records, Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) Forms 300/300A, investigation results, safety data sheets), trend your organization's workplace injuries and illnesses, and discover solutions to prevent future exposure to health hazards.

IMMUNIZATIONS

In some organizations, OH professionals provide immunizations to employees. These immunizations may range from seasonal influenza vaccinations to tetanus, tuberculosis, hepatitis B, and/or other immunizations employees may need prior to performing specific jobs or working in certain geographical locations. OSHA requires some organizations, especially those organizations in the healthcare industry, to provide testing and immunizations for diseases such as hepatitis B and tuberculosis.



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TRAINING, AWARENESS & PROMOTION



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Many organizations rely on OH staff to provide hearing conservation, radiation, and other health-related training. Review your employee training matrix and work with OH and IH personnel to determine the types and frequency of training your employees require.

Off-the-job factors beyond your organization's control can also impact your employees' health. You can *influence* employees' off-the-job behaviors by establishing voluntary health and wellness programs addressing physical fitness, nutrition, smoking cessation, drug abuse and excessive alcohol use, etc.

Effective communications with OH professionals, emergency response providers, S&H staff, and, at appropriate times, the media, are critical for an effective OHCP. OH staff should participate in your installation S&H Policy Council/Committee meetings to address OHCP concerns, program effectiveness, and ideas for improvement.

For additional information on the SMCX's services, please visit the SMCX-hosted website at: <https://www.smscx.org/>.

