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# HALDIMAND COUNTY

Report HRD-01-2023 Health and Safety Policy and Program  
For Consideration by Council in Committee on February 7, 2023

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## OBJECTIVE:

To inform Council of the County's 2022 health and safety performance, as well as to approve the 2023 Occupational Health and Safety Policy and Program.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report HRD-01-2023 Health and Safety Policy and Program Report be received;
2. AND THAT the 2023 Occupational Health and Safety Program be approved as outlined in Report HRD-01-2023;
3. AND THAT Policy No. 2022-01 be rescinded and replaced with the 2023 Occupational Health and Safety Policy, as outlined in Attachment 5 to Report HRD-01-2023.

**Prepared by:** Katie Meyer, Supervisor, Employee Wellness and Development

**Reviewed by:** Megan Jamieson, Director of Human Resources

**Respectfully submitted:** Cathy Case, General Manager of Corporate & Social Services

**Approved:** Craig Manley, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The overall health and safety performance at Haldimand County continues to be successfully maintained, with changes, as new legislation and hazards have been introduced over the past few years. This confirms the County's safety programs are having the desired impact and the importance of continuing to adapt safety programs as the workforce, hazards and legislation evolve. In 2022, the County experienced another unique year managing both regular safety programs, as well as adapting ways of work as the County continued to respond to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). Through the constant change, staff continued to demonstrate ongoing commitment to the health and safety program by applying the principles of health and safety through prompt reporting of incidents, development of protocol and policy, ongoing training and communication efforts, safety discussions, and Joint Health and Safety Committees, to name a few elements. Although the COVID-19 measures appeared to have loosened provincially in the spring, staff were heavily involved in the stringent protocols that remained in healthcare settings and managing the risk within administrative and operations settings.

The 2023 Occupational Health and Safety Program will continue to enhance health and safety practices and knowledge, manage the COVID-19 response and understand the needs of the workforce, by incorporating new mental health strategies to manage incidents, stress, anxiety and fatigue.

In addition, the 2023 health and safety program aims to mitigate the number of injuries/illnesses occurring within the County by: ensuring current policies/procedures/guidelines are effective and being enforced; providing support to staff to encourage discussion around mental health; utilizing the Joint

Health and Safety Committee members to enhance health and safety culture; and continuing to train and engage all employees to further improve health and safety performance.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Section 25(2)(j) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (the Act) requires employers to prepare and review, at least annually, a written Occupational Health and Safety Policy as well as to develop and maintain a health and safety program to implement that policy.

In 2022, Council approved the Occupational Health and Safety Policy contained in Report HRD-01-2022. In the same report, Council was informed that the 2022 health and safety program would continue with the development of health and safety guidelines, as well as the provision of a variety of health and safety-related training, programs, and communication initiatives. Staff recognize 2022 continued to require a significant amount of work in managing changing responses to COVID-19. The current report provides a brief description of the status of those initiatives, including that of COVID-19, as well as some statistics on overall health and safety performance of the various County operations in 2022.

Haldimand County is a Schedule 2 Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) employer, meaning that the County self insures the full cost of workplace injuries for all employees. As a result, it is imperative that the County has a strong health and safety program to minimize the risk and cost of workplace injury.

## **ANALYSIS:**

### 2022 Health and Safety Initiatives Undertaken:

In 2022, the following health and safety initiatives were undertaken:

1. Implemented and managed COVID-19 safety measures including, but not limited to:
  - a. Revised standard operating procedures based on current situations and public health measures;
  - b. Provided regular communications to staff on the current COVID-19 measures in place and adapted response efforts based on Public Health direction and risk level (healthcare vs non-healthcare);
  - c. Managed submissions of the worker income protection benefit to ensure all eligible staff were not financially impacted due to COVID-19;
  - d. Performed ergonomic assessments, as requested, and developed “at home” office resources for employees required to work remotely to comply with provincial restrictions, childcare needs or self-isolation requirements;
  - e. Provided direction, monitored and managed all confirmed and potential COVID-19 cases within staff (over 430 staff isolations were reported and managed in 2022);
  - f. Aide in workplace outbreak case management including investigating how the virus was contracted (work related for all positive staff), as well as audits from the Ministry of Labour;
  - g. Worked closely with infection control to mitigate COVID-19 risk within Grandview Lodge (GVL) through audits and revised procedures;
  - h. Administered three COVID-19 Vaccination Policies across Haldimand County with two policies still active. The COVID-19 Vaccination Team managed all vaccination disclosures, testing requirements, and the recruitment of only vaccinated staff. The Policy required a significant amount of time for the team to manage test submissions,

compliance with the Policy, leave of absences, and progressive discipline/terminations of those in non-compliance with the Policy.

2. Administered a hybrid work model to administrative staff, navigating through the health and safety hazards presented as the definition of “workplace” expanded to include home.
3. Training on WSIB Case Management and Sick Leave practices for leadership and administrative staff, for better understanding and to ensure efficiencies in process were being met.
4. Health and safety training matrices were amalgamated and re-evaluated based on risk assessments of jobs and legislative compliance.
5. Launched monthly wellness updates utilizing the Employee Family Assistance Program.
6. Wellness committee was very active throughout 2022 with the ultimate goal of building positive and healthy relationships between co-workers given the number of new staff and the isolation many felt during the lockdowns.
7. Partnered with the Community Paramedics to bring the K-9 Therapy Dog program to County staff in efforts to include a holistic approach to employee well-being.
8. Development and launch of the pilot project, External Violence Against Paramedicine (EVAP) to enhance awareness and support of paramedics who deal with chronic exposure to workplace violence, be it verbal harassment, sexual harassment, intimidation or physical assault.
9. Enrolled and received approval for the WSIB Excellence program as staff work towards receiving this designation for County programs.
10. Initiated the Peer Support program, currently in the development stage, in order to provide greater psychological support to first responders.
11. Provided on-site job specific health and safety training to all field staff to allow for hands on training and practical discussion related to their jobs in particular.
12. Delivered health and safety training to targeted groups via online training or facilitated by a professional. A great focus of this years plan will be on “catching up” on training delayed or deferred as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.
13. Revised corporate health and safety orientation including having Grandview Lodge staff participate corporately, and to align with improvements taking place within the general corporate orientation / introduction to Haldimand County workplace culture.
14. Workplace Violence Risk Assessments were reviewed and/or completed for targeted Haldimand County workplaces.

2022 Health and Safety Performance:

*a. Statistics Showing Performance*

A statistical summary of the County’s 2022 health and safety performance, broken down by Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) employee group, relative to previous years on record, is contained in Attachments 1 to 4.

Attachment 1, summarized below, provides a record of Lost Time Injury/Illness (where an employee sustained a work-related injury/illness which prevented them from attending work the day following the incident) since 2018. The total number of incidents has increased since 2020 from 8 to 18 in 2022, as shown in the following table:

<b>JHSC Group</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
Fire	0	0	0
Paramedic Services	4	1	9
CUPE/Non-Union	3	1	3
Grandview Lodge	1	6	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>18</b>

The lost time claims were primarily related to over-exertion/strain/sprain from lifting residents or patients, at times in awkward positions. Although Grandview Lodge has a no lift policy, staff are required to move residents to positions to utilize mechanical aids, or when unexpected movements occur (i.e. when a resident falls). As well, paramedics are generally required to lift patients in less than ideal conditions with limited control over the environment; these situations are common practices for both and put them at a greater risk of injury. Nonetheless, staff worked diligently on all lost time claims to offer suitable modified duties, and to return the injured employees to work as soon as possible to remain engaged in the workplace. Human Resources staff have initiated a number of responses to try to manage the increase lost time incidents. These are outlined in more detail below.

Attachment 2 shows the total number of Medical Aid Injury/Illness incidents where an employee sustains a work-related injury requiring medical attention from a healthcare professional, but is able to immediately return to work on regular or modified duties. The County saw a slight increase in incidents from 26 in 2021 to 28 in 2022. Through analysis of the data, it has been identified there is an increase in staff reporting fatigue, working short, and increased hours due to COVID-19 and the changing workforce which may have contributed to the cause of incidents.

Attachment 3 outlines the total number of Reportable Incidents First Aid/Near Miss, unexpected events that may or may not have caused injury or damage, but did not require medical attention from a healthcare professional. The number of incidents decreased from 61 in 2021 to 48 in 2022, however, remains average in terms of what the data shows year over year.

#### *b. Cause / Type of Accidents*

The cause/type of accidents that occurred in 2022 are provided in Attachment 4. It is important to note three specific areas: sprain (over exertion/strain/sprain); COVID-19; and slips, trips and falls, which have significantly contributed to the 2023 plan.

##### **(I) Over exertion/strain/sprain**

As demonstrated on Attachment 4, over exertion/strain/sprain injuries, or “Sprain” injuries as reported, were the most prevalent reported injury types in 2022. This has been the number one injury over the past 10 years. In 2019, staff developed and launched an ergonomic guideline and training program to CUPE/Non-Union staff which has contributed to a reduction in this type of injury within CUPE/Non-Union staff. To mitigate this hazard, staff are continuing their efforts in education around body mechanics, as well as working with the Wellness Committee to increase awareness and access to information for shift workers regarding a well-balanced diet and keeping muscles strong. Grandview Lodge had an increase in over exertion/strain/sprain injuries in 2022 which accounted for the majority of strain injuries in 2022. In analyzing the incidents, it was identified that there are contributing factors causing these injuries including increased workload, staff shortages (isolations/vacancies/burnout), extended COVID-19 outbreaks and COVID-19 fatigue. Staff were more susceptible to these injuries and did not recover as fast. It is noteworthy that, due to the pandemic, access to healthcare (physiotherapy, chiropractor) has been delayed or offered virtually contributing to delays in recovery. It was also common for staff to work with employees treating physical injuries which had secondary psychological stressors delaying RTW as illustrated in modified duties hours. Staff are working closely with Grandview Lodge to address the contributing factors (staffing levels/retention/burnout). As well, Grandview Lodge and Paramedic Services JHSC’s will continue to be worked with to address ergonomics.

##### **(II) Slips, Trips and Falls**

Slip, trip and fall injuries continue to be a primary cause of injury to staff. Although historically these injuries were as a result of ice, in 2022, these injuries were primarily seen at Grandview Lodge as a result of hazards (cords, furniture, walking aids) in residents bedrooms. The Grandview Lodge Joint Health and Safety is cognizant of this hazard and is actively auditing

resident bedrooms with these hazards in mind on a monthly basis. The Committee will continue to work towards mitigating these risks.

**(III) Workplace Violence**

Over the past two years, staff exposure to “workplace violence” or violations of “respect in the workplace” from external customers has been on the rise. In particular, Paramedics and public-facing staff such as Customer Service Representatives and Municipal Enforcement Officers saw significant uptake in disgruntled customers. Staff attribute some of these increased behaviours to psychological stress on the community as the County continues to see the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, staff collaborated with paramedic services to join a pilot project focused on addressing this issue called External Violence Against Paramedics (EVAP). Through this program, paramedics logged concerning calls to ensure it was flagged should medics be called back to this address. As the program continues, staff will further work with the Haldimand OPP to ensure their presence at repeat offenders or high risk addresses. When a call is logged through the EVAP program, Deputies are informed and complete a wellbeing check with the impacted medics. Additionally, frontline staff were provided with training on *Dealing With Difficult Customers* through Mohawk College to ensure they have the skill set to manage calls.

**c. Lost Time Claims**

Further to Attachment 1, the following table shows the overall lost time hours since 2012. It is evident that the lost time experience has significantly increased over recent years, however, if analyzed, a significant portion of the hours are related to psychological injury claims. The County also experienced an increase in physical injuries where a pre-existing psychological condition (non-occupational) hinders the staff members ability to recover for a safe and early return to work. Staff work closely with the WSIB to delineate between compensable and non-compensable injury/illness and challenges in return to work. It is evident that the spike in lost time hours over the past years is directly linked to the legislative changes related to presumptive liability, mental health regulations, and a better acceptance of mental health issues in general. Staff launched additional training around the Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP) to ensure they are aware of how to access resources available to them. In late 2022, staff started the implementation of a peer support program in efforts to open the communication between peers alike to talk about trauma. In 2023, staff will collaborate with paramedic services to continue to develop the program and ensure the proper tools are available to members of the team and the service.

Lost Time Hours by JHSC				
Year	Paramedic Services	Fire	CUPE/Non-Union	Grandview Lodge
2009	2,811.0	0	1,838.25	Hours not tracked
2010	435.5	0	174.0	
2011	527.5	30	456.5	
2012	435.5	0	174.0	
2013	227.0	0	42.5	
2014	24.0	160	25.0	
2015	370.5	0	18.5	
2016	406.5	0	66.0	
2017	413.5	8	56.0	
2018	2,663.5 (96% PTSD related)	0	1,931.0 (93% PTSD related)	

2019	1,793.0 (84% PTSD related)	0	656.5 (35% PTSD related)	492.0 (53% mental health related)
2020	516.0 (80% PTSD related)	0	2,184.5 (60% PTSD related)	95.5
2021	517.0	0	2,624.0 (70% PTSD related)	129.25
2022	1,723.0 (92% PTSD related)	0	1,907.5 (56% PTSD related)	537.0

Note: hours related to self-isolation for COVID-19 claims are not captured in this table.

d. *Return to Work – Modified Duties*

Under various legislation, including Human Rights, the County has the duty to accommodate injured/ill workers to the point of undue hardship. As a result, modified duties are offered to accommodate workplace injury related restrictions and to allow for the employee to return to work, in some capacity, as early as appropriate. In these cases, an injured employee may be brought back to work to perform alternate work duties above current complement. If modified duties are not offered and the employee is not able to work, then the number of lost time hours would be much higher. Any loss of earnings by virtue of the employee not being able to work as a result of a workplace injury would need to be paid by the employer, in addition to a WSIB administrative fee. Accordingly, offering modified duties encourages a cost-effective, safe and early return to work and allows the employee to remain engaged in the workplace while also providing for meaningful work during their recovery.

As shown in the table below (excluding indefinite lost time claims related to psychological injuries), the 2022 modified work decreased in the majority of work groups. What is concerning is the significant increase in modified hours within Grandview Lodge. Although the number of staff accommodated did not increase, the delay in recovery was evident. In 2022, staff worked closely with injured employees to return them to a full capacity, however, employees were requiring modified duties for longer periods. Often a psychological component (due to personal reasons or as a result of the injury) hindered their ability to fully return to work. The Employee Wellness Representative worked closely with these individuals and the WSIB to customize a return to work program suitable for their needs. Another challenge was around difficulty in employees seeking treatment and medical. Due to the pandemic, staff were often challenged with delayed access to treatment, or access to virtual treatment which was appeared to be less effective as recovery was delayed.

<b>Modified Work Hours by JHSC</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>Paramedic Services</b>	<b>Fire</b>	<b>Non-Union /CUPE</b>	<b>Grandview</b>
<b>2009</b>	980.0	1,141.0	2,193.0	6,626.0
<b>2010</b>	252.0	1,317.0	1,917.0	1,624.0
<b>2011</b>	374.0	735.0	48.0	1,437.0
<b>2012</b>	160.0	0.0	0.0	994.0
<b>2013</b>	672.0	463.0	28.0	1,914.0
<b>2014</b>	36.0	358.0	0.0	3,543.0
<b>2015</b>	768.0	0.0	19.5	1,022.0
<b>2016</b>	980.0	0.0	52.0	395.0
<b>2017</b>	234.5	35.0	11.0	1,161.0
<b>2018</b>	234.0	0.0	68.0	716.0
<b>2019</b>	1,148.5	0.0	891.0	1,146.75

			(97% related to 1 PTSD claim)	
<b>2020</b>	1,601.0	0.0	236.0	537.5
<b>2021</b>	1,898.0	0.0	118.0	630.0
<b>2022</b>	329.5	0.0	33.0	3,678.75

*e. Presumptive Liability Legislation Update:*

In 2007, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act (WSIA) was amended to create a presumption for firefighters to be covered under the WSIB for heart injuries and certain cancers without having to prove they are work-related. Over the years, additional cancers were added. In 2016, under the Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act, first responders (fire and paramedics) were provided cover under the WSIB should they develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) without the need to prove a causal link between PTSD and a workplace event. In To date, the WSIB has approved 26 presumptive liability claims filed by Haldimand County first responders related to presumptive cancers, heart disease, or PTSD. In 2022, two presumptive cancer claims and one PTSD claim were approved, with one additional claim awaiting adjudication by the WSIB. Presumptive legislation has proven to have a significant impact financially and is a driver in lost time hours. Staff are actively work with Emergency Services to ensure programs and supports are in place for first responders.

*f. Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19):*

Staff continued without hesitation and across all service areas to respond to the changing workplace by in rethinking and modifying working methods to reduce the spread of COVID-19 as we learned to live the virus. This meant although the virus was still present, restrictions were reduced, however, as an employer, the County still holds the responsibility to ensure workers are healthy and safe.

In the 2022 calendar year, staff, together with the related supervisor have responded to and managed over 413 staff isolations due to confirmed or potential exposure to COVID-19. Where possible, staff were directed to work remotely during isolation periods. For those who were unable to work remotely, staff worked with those required to self-isolate to determine which financial benefit they qualified for (Working Income Protection Benefit, Infectious Disease Emergency Leave, or Canada Recovery Benefit). All benefits required staff to submit applications on behalf of the employee to ensure they qualified for payment. In 2022, staff applied for over 124 paid leaves through the provincial Worker Income Protection Benefit. These costs are tracked and reported for the purposes of access to available provincial funding or other grant opportunities. Additionally, staff who developed symptoms was assumed to be work-related during a Grandview Lodge outbreak, or if a paramedic treated a potential COVID-19 patient and developed symptoms. As a result, 37 COVID-19 claims were submitted to the WSIB resulting in lost time costs of 1,071.25 lost hours. Staff also monitored staffing levels, as well as implemented “test to work” protocols when areas met critical staff levels for such as Paramedic Services and Grandview Lodge.

In 2021, the County introduced three COVID-19 Vaccination Policies; two of them requiring the vaccine as mandatory (Grandview Lodge and Paramedic Services). In spring 2022, the non-mandatory policy was revoked, however the two mandatory policies remain in effect. Throughout 2022, the COVID-19 Response Team continued to monitor testing requirements, respond to isolations, and confirm vaccination status of new hires.

All occupational illnesses are legislatively required to be reported to the Ministry of Labour. As a result of COVID-19 exposures to healthcare staff, there was an increased Ministry presence in 2022. Staff worked closely with Ministry inspectors to ensure best practices were being implemented.

Throughout 2023, Staff will continue to not only look at the immediate safety risks (exposure to COVID-19) and new opportunities, but the psychological impacts the pandemic has created on staff. As the County begins to re-open in a much greater capacity and precautions are removed, there is a changed perception on the way work is done, which means revised or new health and safety programs must emerge.

*Proposed 2023 Health and Safety Policy and Program:*

Section 25(2)(j) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act requires employers to review, at least once annually, a written Occupational Health and Safety Policy, as well as to develop a Health and Safety program to implement that Policy.

A copy of the recommended 2023 Occupational Health and Safety Policy is included as Attachment 5. The JHSC Co-chairs, as well as the Senior Management Team, have reviewed the Policy and have recommended no changes to the currently approved 2022 Policy.

The proposed Health and Safety Program has been developed for 2023 in consultation with the JHSC's and those Managers whose operations are directly impacted by the proposals. The initiatives focus on reviewing health and safety practices and providing greater education to all staff on mental health and psychological injuries in the workplace and COVID-19 safety and fatigue. Specifically, the following plan has been established:

1. Continue to monitor COVID-19 response measures within the workplace.
2. Develop and deliver a comprehensive leadership training program for those in supervisory roles including training and information on:
  - Health and safety training
  - Stay at Work programs
3. Revise the Working at Heights program, including a comprehensive inspection program and new tool development required to aid staff in inspections, as well as for record purposes.
4. Begin to review and modernize Health and Safety policies and programs and move towards a comprehensive Health and Safety manual which will aid in the new training program and ongoing resource support.
5. Continue with the participation in the WSIB Excellence Program with the goal of achieving the first level of recognition by fall 2023. This program is an opportunity to audit the County workplace Health and Safety programs, connect with professionals on best practices, and improve workplace culture. The program helps businesses create goals and objectives, create a healthier and safer workplace, and is an opportunity to review County programs and receive recognition for health and safety achievements.
6. Begin developing an Emergency Protocols manual including information such as, but not limited to, fire safety, safety, lockdown, shelter in place, and extreme weather events (e.g. tornado). It is anticipated that this initiative will span over the next few years and will be accomplished in priority order.
7. Begin the development of a Corporate Claims Management Policy based on current practices.
8. Implement a claims management software to aid in the confidential management of all occupational and non-occupation injuries and illnesses.

## **FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The proposed 2023 Occupational Health and Safety Program will not require any additional funds to implement as all anticipated expenditures can be accommodated within the base budget. Should an

unexpected issue arise during the year that requires additional funds, a report will be submitted to Council for specific approval.

Approval of this report, specifically as it relates to the 2023 Policy and Program will meet Haldimand County's legal obligations under Section 25(2) (j) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

### **STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:**

Health and safety impacts all areas of the Corporation. Time will be required of Managers, Non-Union Supervisors, JHSC representatives and select employees to provide input into the preparation of risk assessments, development of policies/procedures and participation in training and workplace inspections mandated by the County.

### **REPORT IMPACTS:**

Agreement: No

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: No

Policy: Yes

### **REFERENCES:**

None.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Total Number of Lost Time Accidents by JHSC from 2012-2022
2. Total Number of No Lost Time Accidents by JHSC from 2012-2022
3. Total Number of Incidents by JHSC from 2018-2022
4. 2022 Injuries by Cause
5. 2023 Proposed Occupational Health and Safety Policy