Overall, there are 14 jurisdictions in Canada covering health and safety in the workplace: one for each province (10 total), one for each territory (3 total) and one federal. Saskatchewan was the first Province in Canada to introduce occupational health and safety legislation in Canada in 1972 (The Occupational Health Act, 1972).

In Canada, OHS regulation and legislation is primarily the responsibility of the Provinces; for the majority of workplaces, therefore, the responsible agency would the corresponding agency provincially. General responsibilities of governments in Canada for OHS include enforcement of legislation, inspection of workplaces, resolution of OHS&S disputes, and promotion of training, education and research.

In Saskatchewan, the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety is the regulatory body enforcing the relevant Provincial Acts and Regulations, with dedicated Occupational Health Officers to enforce legislation, and physician assistance from a Chief Occupational Medical Officer. Each other Province and Territory in Canada will also have dedicated Officers, though the presence of physician assistance varies from Province to Province in scope and degree. It is estimated that 6% of the workforce in Canada falls under Federal OHS regulations. The remaining majority fall under provincial or territorial jurisdiction.

Workplaces that are federally regulated by The Canada Labour Code include those whose work applies between or across Provinces or internationally. Examples would be banks, transport, railway, shipping, telephone, airports, and airlines, among others. While each jurisdiction has differences in specific legislation, many principles are shared, such as the right for workers to know about hazards in the workplace, the right to participate in health and safety issues through a committee, and the right to refuse unusually dangerous work.

Other basic elements such as rights and responsibilities of workers, employers, and supervisors, are similar across Canadian jurisdictions. In Canada, radiation safety also has both Federal and Provincial jurisdictions. Federally, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission regulates use, possession and production of nuclear substances and equipment and regulates the nuclear fuel cycle. Non-nuclear sources of radiation such as occupational lasers, UV, x-ray, ultrasound, mammography, etc., are regulated provincially. Inspections in Canada are done by occupational health officers in each Province or Territory.

OHS inspections can be geared towards targeted employers (for example, those with high injury or incident rates), planned or directed inspections (by sector), or inspections based on complaints. Workers’ Compensation, as in many jurisdictions, is a separate system in Canada from occupational health and safety regulation, covering compensation for workers in the event of illness or injury due to work.

Workers’ Compensation is underlined by 5 key principles known collectively as the Meredith Principles, consisting of 1) No-fault compensation, 2) Security of benefits, 3) Collective liability, 4) Independent administration, 5) Exclusive jurisdiction. Injured workers in turn surrender their right to sue their employer for their work-related injury.

It is common for there to be communication between Workers’ compensation agencies in Canada and the respective Provincial regulator to identify sectors or areas where there are increased claims (for example) that might warrant more regulatory enforcement. Environmental regulations in Canada are shared between Federal and Provincial (or Territorial) agencies, though unlike occupational health and safety legislation, the distribution between Federal and Provincial authority is more balanced, in general.