CALGARY SAFETY CONSULTANTS

Safe Work Practice vs Procedure Guide

Guide and checklist

How to use this guide

Use this guide to sort your tasks into those that need a safe work practice and those that need a safe work procedure, to check the quality of what you write, and to keep track of every practice and procedure in one register. Work through it with supervisors, the workers who do the jobs and your committee or representative. Fill it in on screen or print it.

- **Sections 1 to 4** explain the difference, show what each looks like and help you decide which one each task needs, with worked decisions.
- **Section 5** summarizes when the law requires written procedures. **Sections 6 and 7** check writing quality and common mistakes.
- **Section 8** is a safe work practice template, **Section 9** a review checklist and **Section 10** the procedure inventory register, followed by sign-off.
- **Terms vary:** safe job procedure, standard operating procedure, safe operating procedure, work procedure and work instruction all mean much the same as safe work procedure.

Definitions

Term	Meaning
Safe work practice	A general set of guidelines or rules for doing a type of work safely, written as positive and negative statements (do's and don'ts). Applies broadly.
Safe work procedure	A written, step-by-step sequence for one specific task, usually a high-risk or critical task identified by the hazard assessment. Steps are followed in order.
Code of practice	In some jurisdictions, a required written document setting out procedures for a specific hazard, such as confined spaces in Alberta.
Job hazard analysis (JHA)	A breakdown of a job into steps to identify the hazards and controls at each step. The usual starting point for a procedure.
Administrative control	A control that changes the way people work, such as practices, procedures, training, permits and supervision.

Section 1: Practice and procedure compared

Feature	Safe work practice	Safe work procedure
What it is	General guidelines or rules for a type of work	A step-by-step sequence for one specific task
Scope	Broad: many tasks, jobs or locations	Narrow: one task, often one machine or location
Format	Do's and don'ts, in any order	Numbered steps in order, each starting with a verb
Order of steps	Doesn't matter	Matters; follow the sequence written
Used for	Common work with moderate hazards	High-risk, complex, critical or infrequent tasks
Typical length	One page of rules	One or two pages, about 8 to 15 main steps
Training	Orientation, toolbox talks, posted rules	Task training, practical demonstration and sign-off
Relationship	Can support one or more procedures	Can refer back to the practices that apply

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Section 2: Examples

Safe work practice examples	Safe work procedure examples
Portable ladder use	Locking out conveyor C-3 to clear a jam
Manual lifting and carrying	Entering tank T-101 for inspection
Housekeeping and walkways	Changing the blade on panel saw PS-2
Hand and power tool use	Pigging a specific pipeline segment
Working in cold weather	Changing a forklift propane cylinder
Handling hazardous products under WHMIS	Filling the caustic day tank in the wash bay

Section 3: What each one looks like

Sample safe work practice: portable ladder use (excerpt). Rules that apply wherever ladders are used. The order doesn't matter.

- Do inspect the ladder before each use and tag out any damaged ladder.
- Do set the ladder on firm, level footing at a 4 to 1 angle, and extend it 1 m above the landing.
- Do face the ladder and keep three points of contact while climbing.
- Don't stand on the top two rungs or the top cap of a stepladder.
- Don't carry tools or materials in your hands while climbing; use a tool belt or hoist line.
- Don't use a metal ladder near energized electrical equipment.

Sample safe work procedure: locking out conveyor C-3 to clear a jam (excerpt). One task, numbered steps, followed in order.

No.	Step	Hazard and control
1	Tell the operator and anyone working on line 3 that C-3 is being locked out.	Someone restarting the line. Communicate first.
2	Press the C-3 STOP button at the control panel.	Moving belt. Wait until it stops completely.
3	Open disconnect MCC-2, cell 4, labelled C-3.	Unexpected start-up. Isolate at the disconnect.
4	Apply your personal lock and a completed danger tag.	Others re-energizing. One lock per worker.
5	Press START at the local station to verify C-3 won't run.	Isolation failure. If it moves, stop and call the supervisor.
6	Press STOP to return the control to off.	Start-up when locks come off. Controls back to off.
7	Block the take-up pulley with the yellow pin.	Stored energy in the belt tension.

Illustrative examples only. Write your own practices and procedures for your equipment, and follow the manufacturer's instructions and the law that applies to you.

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Section 4: Which does this task need?

Answer these questions for each task on your hazard assessment. If you answer yes to any of questions 1 to 5, write a safe work procedure. If you answer yes only to question 6, a safe work practice is usually enough.

Task | **Department or area** | **Date**

Question	Yes	No
1. Could a mistake in the order of steps cause a serious injury or illness?	☐	☐
2. Does legislation or our certifying partner require a written procedure or plan for this task?	☐	☐
3. Is the task complex, or done so rarely that people may not remember the steps?	☐	☐
4. Is the task done by new, young or less experienced workers?	☐	☐
5. Has the task been linked to an incident, near miss or inspection finding?	☐	☐
6. Is it a general type of work, done many ways, where the order of steps doesn't matter?	☐	☐

Decision

☐ Safe work procedure
☐ Safe work practice
☐ Both (procedure supported by a practice)
☐ Neither (covered by training or a crew talk)

Decided by | **Owner of the document** | **Due date**

Worked decisions

Task	Decision	Why
General shop housekeeping	Practice	Moderate hazards, done many ways, order doesn't matter.
Lockout of the hydraulic press for die change	Procedure	A missed or out-of-order step could cause a fatal crush injury; lockout procedures are required in several jurisdictions.
Annual entry into the wastewater sump	Procedure	Confined space, done once a year so nobody remembers the steps; written confined space procedures are required in several jurisdictions.
Using a portable grinder	Practice, plus a procedure for changing the disc	General use is rule-based; the disc change has a set sequence and a serious hazard.
Office filing and photocopying	Neither	Low hazard; covered by orientation and general rules.

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Section 5: When the law requires written procedures (summary)

Summary as of October 2026. Many other regulations also require procedures or plans. Check the current legislation for your jurisdiction.

Jurisdiction	Program-level rule	Examples of hazard-specific written procedures or plans
Alberta	Program for 20 or more workers (OHS Act s. 16); written hazard assessments	Fall protection plan at 3 m (Code s. 140); confined space code of practice (s. 44); violence and harassment prevention plan
British Columbia	Program with written instructions for all workers (Reg. s. 3.3) for 20+ workers in moderate or high hazard work, or 50+	Lockout to a written procedure (Part 10); confined space program and procedures (Part 9); fall protection plan at 7.5 m (s. 11.3); working alone check-in (s. 4.21); hazardous substances (s. 5.2)
Saskatchewan	Written OHS program at prescribed workplaces with 10+ workers (Sask. Employment Act s. 3-20); workers follow practices and procedures (Regs s. 3-2)	Exposure control plan (6-22); fall protection plan (9-3); cleaning moving equipment (10-7); confined space entry plan (18-7); fire safety plan (25-2)
Manitoba	Written program for 20+ workers with training in safe work practices and procedures (WSH Act s. 7.4); safe work procedures section (Reg. s. 2.1.1)	Working alone procedures, posted (9.3); fall protection (14.2); rope access (28.1.4); diving (43.2)
Ontario	Written policy reviewed yearly and a program where more than 5 workers (OHSA 25(2)(j))	Confined space program with entry permit procedures and plans (O. Reg. 632/05); violence and harassment programs
Quebec	Prevention program for establishments with 20+ workers (s. 58); training and supervision (s. 51)	Hazard-specific rules in the Regulation respecting occupational health and safety
Nova Scotia	Program for 20+ employees with a method for writing safe work procedures (OHS Act s. 28)	Violence and harassment rules
New Brunswick	Written program for 20+ employees with written work procedures (OHS Act s. 8.1)	Written lockout procedure (Reg. 91-191 s. 239); codes of practice, including working alone
Prince Edward Island	Written program for 20+ workers, reviewed yearly, with written work procedures (OHS Act s. 23)	Working alone written procedures
Newfoundland and Labrador	Program includes training in job-specific safe work practices (Regs s. 12)	Working alone check procedure (s. 15)
Yukon	No general program rule listed here; check the Workplace Health and Safety Act and Regulations	Lockout procedures in writing to each worker (s. 3.04); written confined space program, entry and rescue procedures (Part 2)
NWT and Nunavut	Written program for 20+ workers at a site, with training in safe work practices and procedures (NWT s. 21)	Written harassment policy (NWT s. 34) and, where violence is a risk, a written violence policy (s. 35); Nunavut: check matching sections
Federal	Hazard prevention program (Canada Labour Code; COHSR Part XIX); hazard prevention education acknowledged in writing	Dated confined space procedures (COHSR s. 11.04)

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Section 6: Writing quality checklist

Check each draft procedure against this list before the field test.

Procedure title and no.	Checked by	Date

- [ ] The task is one specific task, and the title says what it is.
- [ ] The procedure is linked to a hazard assessment or JHA.
- [ ] Workers who do the job helped write it, and their names are recorded.
- [ ] Purpose and scope say where it applies and where it doesn't.
- [ ] Main hazards and controls are summarized, and higher-level controls were considered first.
- [ ] Required PPE, training, tools, equipment and permits are listed.
- [ ] Steps are numbered, in the order they're done, and each starts with a verb.
- [ ] Each step has one action. No step uses "and" to join several actions.
- [ ] Equipment, switches and valves are named by their labels.
- [ ] Warnings come before the step they apply to.
- [ ] Photos or drawings show isolation points and correct positions where helpful.
- [ ] Emergency steps say what to do and who to call.
- [ ] References list legislation, the manufacturer's manual and related practices and forms.
- [ ] Language is plain and short enough for the workers who will use it.
- [ ] Approval, effective date, version and next review date are filled in.
- [ ] A field test is planned with a worker who didn't help write it.

Section 7: Common mistakes and how to fix them

Mistake	Fix
A list of rules called a procedure	If order doesn't matter, call it a practice; write real step-by-step procedures for critical tasks.
Procedures for everything	Focus on critical tasks; cover general work with practices, training and crew talks.
Written at a desk	Walk through the task at the real equipment with the workers who do it.
Vague steps ("make sure it's safe")	Say exactly what to do and how to check it.
Several actions in one step	Split the step; one action each.
Procedure used instead of a better control	Eliminate, substitute or engineer the hazard first.
No field test	Have a worker who didn't write it follow it exactly while you observe.
Training without proof	Include a practical demonstration and signed records.
Old copies at the work location	Remove outdated versions whenever a new one is issued.

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Section 8: Safe work practice template

Use this short template for general work where a full step-by-step procedure isn't needed.

Practice title (type of work)

Practice no.

Version

Applies to (jobs, areas, equipment)

Related hazard assessment or JHA

Main hazards

Do (positive statements)

Don't (negative statements)

PPE required

Training required

Written by

Approved by

Next review date

Section 9: Review checklist

Procedure title and no. | **Current version** | **Review date**

Reason for review

- ☐ Scheduled review
- ☐ Equipment or process change
- ☐ Incident or near miss
- ☐ Worker concern or workaround
- ☐ Inspection or audit finding
- ☐ Change in law or manufacturer's instructions

- ☐ Observed the task being done, and it matches the procedure.
- ☐ Asked the workers who do the task whether it still fits the job.
- ☐ Checked the hazard assessment or JHA is current and matches the procedure.
- ☐ Checked equipment, labels, photos and isolation points are current.
- ☐ Checked incidents, near misses and inspection findings involving the task.
- ☐ Checked legislation and manufacturer's instructions for changes.
- ☐ Confirmed every worker who does the task is trained and signed off on the current version.
- ☐ Removed old copies and recorded the review, even if nothing changed.

Outcome

- ☐ No change needed
- ☐ Minor update
- ☐ Major rewrite and new field test

Changes made and who was retrained

Section 10: Procedure inventory register

List every safe work practice and safe work procedure in one place. Use this register to plan writing, training and reviews, and to show auditors how each document links to your hazard assessments.

No.	Task or document title	Practice	Procedure	Risk (H/M/L)	Owner	Next review	Trained
		☐	☐				☐
		☐	☐				☐
		☐	☐				☐
		☐	☐				☐
		☐	☐				☐
		☐	☐				☐
		☐	☐				☐
		☐	☐				☐
		☐	☐				☐
		☐	☐				☐
		☐	☐				☐

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No.	Task or document title	Practice	Procedure	Risk (H/M/L)	Owner	Next review	Trained
		☐	☐				☐
		☐	☐				☐
		☐	☐				☐
		☐	☐				☐
		☐	☐				☐
		☐	☐				☐
		☐	☐				☐

Sign-off

Reviewed by (manager)

Signature

Date

Committee co-chair or representative

Signature

Next register review

Want help? Calgary Safety Consultants writes safe work procedures and job hazard analyses with your workers and supervisors. Call 1-888-231-0358 or visit calgarysafetyconsultants.ca. Free guide: calgarysafetyconsultants.ca/safety-guides/hazard-management/safe-work-procedure/.

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