

# Health and Safety Guide for Libraries

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Prepared by the Canadian Centre  
for Occupational Health and Safety



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## Target Audience

This guide is for persons employed in different library departments including:

- administration,
- lending services,
- cataloging,
- information services,
- photocopying,
- shelving, and
- audiovisual services.
- housekeeping
- maintenance

## Summary

People employed in libraries do a wide range of automated and manual jobs. In large libraries these jobs may be assigned to one person or a group of persons. In smaller libraries the same person may do several different tasks. Library work has a number of health and safety hazards. These hazards include psychological stress, risk of slips, trips and falls, back injury, personal safety concerns, inadequate workstations, inadequate lighting, dusts, moulds and poor indoor air quality.

The guide provides an overview on the methods of recognition, evaluation and control of hazards in libraries. Basic components of a health and safety program are outlined.

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## Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) System

The purpose of ventilation is to:

1. control temperature and humidity;
2. remove odours and airborne contaminants;
3. introduce outdoor air.

### Symptoms and Concentrations of Carbon Dioxide

Concentration of CO <sub>2</sub>	Symptoms Reported
Less than 600 ppm	None
600 - 1000 ppm	Occasional complaints of headache, drowsiness, stuffiness, etc.
Greater than 1000 ppm	Above complaints are widespread

Source: "Report of the Interministerial Committee on Indoor Air Quality"  
Government of Ontario, September 1988.

### Checklist: Inspecting HVAC Systems

INSPECT outside air dampers, noting their position, the type of control mechanism, and condition.

NOTE the distance and direction of combustion sources, building exhausts, cooling towers and other potential sources of pollutants in relation to the outside air intake.

EXAMINE garage and loading dock for proper ventilation and pollution migration.

CHECK supply air fans for operational problems, including defective belts, missing blades, build-up of particulates, and microbial growth.

CHECK the interior of the mixing chambers for signs of failing insulation, debris, rust, or microbial growth.

ENSURE that air ducts and ceiling plenums are being maintained and cleaned to prevent dust from providing a substrata for mould growth.



**AVOID** manoeuvring a fully loaded book truck on carpeting, uneven surfaces, ramps and differences in floor levels.

**CHECK** that the book truck moves easily.

**PUSH** rather than pull, book trucks.

**CONTROL** the cart from the low side when going up or down a slope.

**PULL** (not push) book trucks when exiting an elevator

**KEEP** book truck close to your body.

**ENSURE** that handles are at protected places on the racks or body of the truck so that traffic, walls, or other objects being passed will not crush or scrape the operator's hands.

**INSPECT** book trucks for loose and worn out wheels and stability.



**DO NOT** load in a manner that obstructs the operator's vision.

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## 10. Work Organization

Work organization determines what jobs to do and how to do them. Important components of good work organization are:

- ▮ job design,
- ▮ work pace,
- ▮ training and education,
- ▮ adjustment periods, and
- ▮ rest breaks.

### Job Design

Optimal job variety includes:

- ▮ Use of a flexible scheduling system to avoid prolonged periods of intensive material handling.
- ▮ Rotating of staff regularly during each shift among tasks available within their job description (task rotation).
- ▮ Rotating of staff regularly during each shift to tasks normally done by staff of a different category (job rotation).

In all cases, employees must receive effective training for the tasks they perform.

### Job Rotation

Job rotation involves design of tasks to ensure subsequent tasks do not stress similar muscles and joints.

In addition to a reduction in the risk of injury and fatigue, the benefits of job rotation include:

- ▮ decrease in mental monotony;
- ▮ increase in variety of work content;
- ▮ better knowledge and understanding of other operations;

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## **What Factors Increase the Risk of Workplace Violence?**

**Certain work processes, situations and interactions can put people at risk from workplace violence:**

- I working with the public;
- I providing service, care, advice or education;
- I working alone or in small numbers;
- I having a mobile workplace (e.g., bookmobiles);
- I working during periods of intense organizational change (e.g., strikes, downsizing).

**Risk of violence may be greater at certain times of the day, night or year:**

- I the late hours of the night or early hours of the morning;
- I specific times of the day, days of the week or months:
  - tax return season,
  - overdue utility bill cut-off dates,
  - Christmas season in the retail market when demand for service is higher.
- I in times of certain business or organizational activities that may increase stress, such as:
  - report cards or parent interviews,
  - performance appraisals,
  - contract negotiations.

**Risk of violence may be greater because of the geographic location of the library:**

- I near buildings or businesses that are at risk of violent crime, e.g., bars, banks or certain social service agencies;
- I in a location likely to be accidentally visited by violent, criminal, intoxicated or drugged persons;
- I in high crime or dense manufacturing areas;
- I isolated from other buildings or structures.

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## Establishing an Emergency Response Plan

It is essential that your library has a specific plan which clearly outlines how to respond to emergency situations. The plan should address most incidents, but be easy to understand and remember.

Consider the following steps when developing your plan:

1. Determine how to secure the workplace.
2. Establish internal emergency numbers and/or code words to alert security or co-workers that urgent help is required.
3. Identify the circumstances in which a command centre would be necessary and how it would be set up.
4. Assign responsibilities for decision making and action to staff with the appropriate skills and authority. Appoint alternates in case a key player is absent during an incident.
5. Provide clear guidelines to follow in various situations.
6. Provide the training necessary to respond to and defuse potentially violent situations.
7. Outline how supervisors are expected to respond to reported incidents of violence or harassment.
8. Identify scenarios where you would call for emergency services.
9. Identify who is responsible for contacting emergency services such as:
  - security.
  - the police.
  - emergency response personnel.
  - victim support resources.
  - other outside assistance.

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### During a bomb threat evacuation:



**SEARCH** your immediate area.

**UNLOCK** drawers, cabinets, etc. for the search crew and identify any strange or unfamiliar objects.

**TAKE** your personal property with you e.g., briefcase, purse, lunch container.

**FOLLOW** standard evacuation procedures.



**DO NOT** touch any suspicious object or device.  
Report only.

