

The Partnerships Program: A Canadian Success Story

**Holly C. Elke, CSP, CRSP, CMQOE
Assistant General Manager
SDS Consulting Corporation
Calgary, AB, Canada**

Introduction

The voluntary “Partnerships in Health and Safety (Partnerships)” program was first introduced to employers in Alberta in 1989. This program was considered the first step in addressing a growing concern amongst employers, workers and the government that legislated health and safety programs were not reducing workplace injuries and costs. This program was also designed to support the concept that the development of health and safety practices that are driven by internal needs, the Internal Responsibility (IR) system, are more likely be accepted and used.

Through a series of focused meetings between Alberta Occupational Health & Safety (AOH&S), Workers Compensation Board (WCB), employers, industry groups and labour, the Partnerships program evolved from a pilot program for 2 industries into a provincial program that affects all industries. A defined structure for developing, implementing and assessing a basic health and safety system is at the core of the program. A series of financial incentives, provided by the Alberta WCB, are linked to the successful implementation of the requirements defined in this structure.

After 17 years of operation, there are still many Alberta employers, and organizations moving to Alberta, that are unaware of the benefits of participating in this unique Canadian program. There is also a lack of awareness that the success of this program is being examined and piloted in the surrounding provinces of British Columbia and Saskatchewan. This paper will focus on providing organizations with the basic information on how to join the “Partnerships” program and where to obtain vital information on the financial incentives that are offered.

The Evolution of the Partnerships Program

In 1988, Mr. Vern Mallard undertook the task of conducting an extensive review of the Alberta Workers Compensation Board (WCB) and operating systems. One of the major recommendations of the Mallard report was for the WCB to take a more proactive role in injury reduction. The report suggested that this action might be accomplished by working with Alberta Occupational Health and Safety, industry associations and labor organizations. Within the same time period, Alberta Occupational Health and Safety (AOH&S) was also studying the merits of legislating the requirement for health and safety programs for employers in Alberta. This task was assigned to Executive Director William Rozel and Industry Liaison Manager, Robert Hird of AOH&S.

Under the guidance of Mr. Rozel and Mr. Hird, Alberta Occupational Health and Safety conducted an extensive review of North American legislation that required mandatory health and safety programs, and the companies that had instituted these programs. The review concluded that companies with legislated OH&S programs in place had not been able to significantly reduce the number of injury claims being incurred or the costs associated with these claims. The main reasons for this lack of success were:

1. A lack of commitment by the senior management towards OH&S, and;
2. A lack of enforcement by the governing body responsible for health and safety, and;
3. A lack of expertise, or competency, in health and safety program development and evaluation.

At the conclusion of both of these reviews, Alberta OH&S, WCB, industry groups and labor were brought together to find a meaningful solution to the need for implemented health and safety programs throughout all industries in the province. The Alberta government responded to these discussions by making the decision to not legislate the requirements of a basic health and safety program, but to make this a voluntary initiative that would be driven by industry and supported by the government.

In 1989, a pilot program known as the Window of Opportunity (WOO) was initiated by Alberta OH&S, WCB, industry and labor. These groups worked together to develop a basic health and safety program that could eventually be implemented by Alberta businesses. Initially, the pilot project was limited to 2 industries that were considered to have the highest claim rates in the province, meatpacking and roofing. The WCB introduced an incentive program that would allow participants in the program to receive up to 25% of their premiums as a refund for a reduction in claims costs. In the first year of the program, the meatpacking industry reduced their number of claims by 26%.

The Alberta Road Builders Association soon contacted AOH&S and requested that they also be allowed to participate in this initiative. As the pilot program had demonstrated a significant success in reducing injury claims, AOH&S and the WCB agreed to develop a program that would allow other industries to participate. This initiative was called the “Partners in Injury Reduction” program and is one of the key elements of the current “Partnerships in Health and Safety” program in use today.

The success of the above efforts and initiatives throughout all industries has been one of the primary reasons that there has been a significant reduction of work place injuries and associated costs in Alberta workplaces. In fact, these reductions have been so significant that employers in Alberta now have the second lowest WCB rates in North America.

The Core Principles of Partnerships

There are five core principles that create the foundation of the “Partnerships in Health and Safety” program. These are summarized below.

1. The program is based on the premise that when employers and workers combine their efforts to build an effective health and safety management system in their own workplaces, the social and financial costs of workplace injuries and illnesses will be reduced;

2. The program is built on the belief that when a co-operative and collaborative approach is used, rather than just a regulatory, interventionist approach, more can be achieved;
3. Effective health and safety management systems have been shown to have an impact on reducing workplace injury and illness, minimizing or eliminating the associated financial and social effects, and on strengthening the business success of participating employers;
4. The program adopts a business-like approach to health and safety issues by empowering corporate leaders in the province to take pro-active roles in creating a climate that promotes partnerships between employers and workers in order to implement a positive health and safety culture in the workplace. This ultimately leads to greater industry self-reliance and less government intervention.
5. Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE), Workplace Health and Safety – Partnerships, formerly Alberta Occupational Health and Safety (AOH&S), will enter into a partnership with organizations that commit to taking a pro-active leadership role in workplace health and safety.

What has the program achieved?

In 2004, over 5000 participating employers received more than \$63 million dollars in WCB premium rebates. The rebate amounts returned to each industry certifying partner is detailed in the table below.

Certifying Partner	
Alberta Association for Safety Partnerships	\$3,818,094.65
Alberta Construction Safety Association	\$19,385,776.64
Alberta Food Processors Association	\$1,831,770.15
Alberta Forest Products Association	\$2,233,682.59
Alberta Hotel Safety Association	\$425,865.80
Alberta Long Term Care Association	\$2,871,147.89
Alberta Motor Transport Association	\$3,772,736.32*
Alberta Municipal Health and Safety Association	\$1,729,891.77
Alberta Safety Council	\$2,143,627.49
Alberta Safety Council for Seniors Housing	\$97,655.38
Manufacturers' Health & Safety Association	\$3,105,488.60
Petroleum Industry Training Service	\$11,759,334.89
Textile Rental Institute of Alberta	\$45,614.75
Western Wood Truss Association of Alberta	\$554,063.91
TOTALS	\$63,000,000.00

**Forecasted*

Exhibit 1. Summary of WCB rebates to industry through the industry Certifying Partners.¹

In addition to the financial incentives paid out to Alberta employers, the following achievements have also been attained in the past sixteen years of operation of the Partnerships/PIR programs:

- In 1989 a rebate of \$2.4 million dollars was shared by 489 employers; in 2004 a rebate of \$63 million dollars was shared by over 5000 participating employers through the integrated WCB-PIR program;
- In 2004, participants in the WCB-PIR achieved a 6.8 percent lower lost-time claim rate than non-participants;
- In 2004, WCB-PIR participants claim costs were 24% lower than non-PIR participants;
- 10,192 companies have registered for the WCB-PIR program in 2005, up from 9,349 in 2004. These companies represent over \$24 billion in insurable earnings.
- The injury rate in Alberta has dropped from 4.9 per 100 in 1990 to 2.6 per 100 workers in 2004. This is the lowest workplace injury rate that this province has seen in over 10 years.²

Participating in the Partnerships Program

Participating in the “Partnerships” program requires the voluntary commitment by an employer operating in Alberta. The following steps are required to join the program and receive the financial benefit offered by the WCB-PIR program, as well as meet the growing contractual requirements being imposed amongst Alberta employers.

Step 1: Program Registration

It is the responsibility of the employer to register in the “Partnerships in Health and Safety” ; registration in the WCB-PIR program is automatic when the aforementioned is completed. Employers who fail to register in the WCB-PIR program may be excluded from receiving the financial benefit to which they are entitled.

To register in the “Partnerships in Health and Safety” Program, a Certifying Partner is selected and contacted for assistance. A Certifying Partner is an organization that has committed to working in partnership with AHRE towards improving the health and safety for Alberta workers. Certifying Partners provide training, review audits, and issue CORs to employers whose audits meet the quality assurance standards. A list of Certifying Partners is presented below.

Alberta Association for Safety Partnerships (AASP) Contact: Jodi Stoddart Phone: (403) 223-9008 Fax: (403) 223-5810	Alberta Construction Safety Association (ACSA) Contact: Beverly Preece Phone: (780) 453-3311 Fax: (780) 455-1120
Alberta Food Processors Association Contact: Tom Shindruk Phone: (403) 201-3657 Fax: (403) 201-2513	Alberta Municipal Health and Safety Association (AMHSA) Contact: Susan Klingspor Phone: (780) 955-3701 Fax: (780) 955-3989

Alberta Forest Products Association (AFPA) Contact: Lloyd Harman Phone: (780) 452-2841 Fax: (780) 455-0505	Alberta Motor Transport Association (AMTA) Contact: John Tessier Phone: (780) 448-7456 Fax: (780) 448-0744
Alberta Hotel Safety Association (AHSA) Contact: Sharon Stewart Phone: (780) 436-6112 Fax: (780) 436-5404	Alberta Personnel Administration Office (PAO) Contact: Michael Miller Phone: (780) 408-8438 Fax: (780) 415-9438
Alberta Safety Council (ASC) Contact: Cindy Schubert Phone: (780) 462-7300 Fax: (780) 462-7318	Continuing Care Safety Association Contact: John Jacobson Phone: (780) 433-5330 Fax: (780) 436-9785
ENFORM Contact: Brad Jackson Phone: (403) 250-9606 Fax: (403) 291-9408	Manufacturers' Health & Safety Association (MHSA) Contact: Mike Joyce Phone: (780) 428-1006 Fax: (780) 487-4529
Textile Rental Institute of Alberta (TRIA) Contact: James O. Painter Phone: (780) 472-6513	Western Wood Truss Association of Alberta Contact: Wayne Clark Phone: (403) 203-0982 Fax: (403) 203-0982

Exhibit 2. List of Certifying Partners.³

Step 2: Implementing a Health and Safety Management System

A health and safety management system is a process put in place by an employer to minimize the incidence of injury and illness to workers involved in the operations carried out by the employer.

To be effective and meet the requirements of the “Partnerships” program, the following components are considered essential elements of a basic health and safety management system.

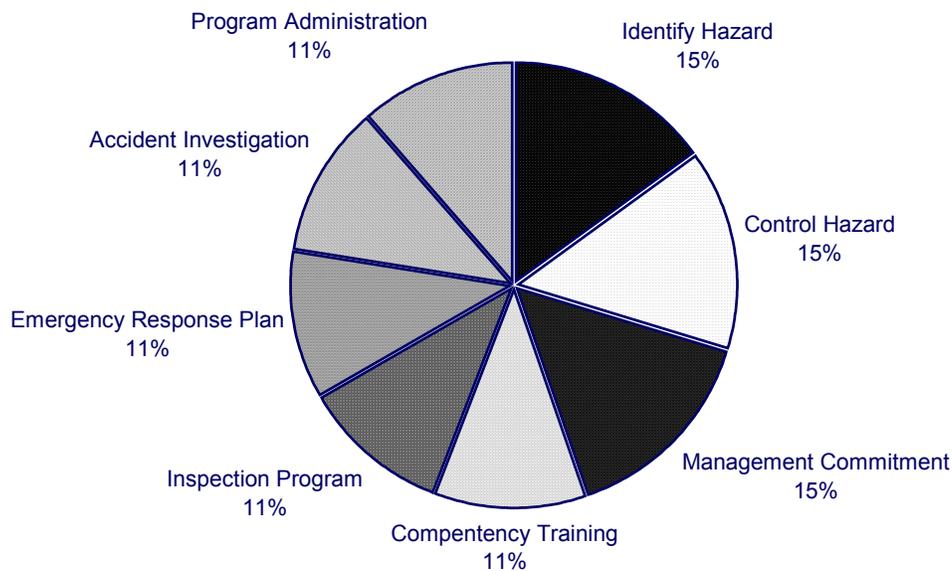


Exhibit 3. Health and Safety Management system requirements and audit standard (percentage of questions allocated to each element) for the Partnerships Program.

These 8 elements are the minimum requirements that each employer must have in their health and safety management system in order to progress to the next step. A summary of these elements is listed below; detailed information on what each element must contain can be found in INFOSHEET 2 published by Workplace Health and Safety.

1. Clearly stated employer health and safety policy and management commitment.
2. Identification and analysis of health and safety hazards at the workplace.
3. Control measures to eliminate or reduce the risks to workers from identified hazards.
4. Worker competency and training.
5. Inspection Program.
6. Incident reporting and investigation.
7. Emergency response planning.
8. Program administration.

Step 3: Obtain a Certificate of Recognition (COR)

The Certificate of Recognition (COR) is a document that is issued jointly by a Certifying Partner and Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Workplace Partnerships (AHRE). The COR recognizes that an employer's health and safety management system has been evaluated by a certified auditor and found to meet the Partnerships standard.

There are several benefits to obtaining a COR through the Partnerships program. These are:

- A reduction in workplace injuries. (Refer to the Core Principles of Partnerships);
- Improving business success and profitability. The elimination of social and financial effects of injuries leads to increased business efficiency and profitability for participating employers;
- Earning financial incentives through the Partners in Injury Reduction (PIR) program offered by the Alberta Worker's Compensation Board. Financial incentives are only awarded once a company has been awarded the Certificate of Recognition;
- Increased access to bidding contracts and new markets. It is not unusual for Alberta corporations to expect bidding contractors to hold a valid COR.

To acquire a COR, an employer must complete the following steps:

1. Select an appropriate audit instrument recognized by the Certifying Partner;
2. Select an external auditor acceptable to the Certifying Partner;
3. Have an audit completed and achieve a pass mark of not less than 80% overall with not less than 50% in any one element;
4. Submit the audit to the Certifying Partner for a quality assurance review;
5. Request the Certifying Partner to issue a COR if the audit meets the quality assurance standards.

If an employer already has a comprehensive health and safety management system in place, the time required to obtain a COR could be less than three months. For those establishing a new system, the amount of time required to complete the process could be twelve months or more.

For employers with ten or fewer workers, a Small Employer COR (SECOR) process may be available; for employers with eleven to thirty workers, there may also be a Medium Employer COR (MECOR) process available, depending on the Certifying Partner selected. The requirements for achieving a COR are the same for all size of employers, but the complexity of the health and safety management system, along with the requirement for an external audit will vary with the size of the employer. The Partnerships group recognized that smaller employers have limited resources. To encourage the participation of this group of employers in the program, a structured plan that could assist organizations at this resource level achieve the standards of the program was created. Specific details for these programs can be obtained directly from the Certifying Partner.

The Audit Process

The audit is a comprehensive review of an employer's health and safety management system. To qualify for a COR, an audit must be conducted by a certified external auditor who is not employed or affiliated with the employer. The certified auditor must use an audit instrument that is approved for use in the Partnerships program, is acceptable to the Certifying Partner and is appropriate to the industry and operations of the employer. The audit will generally cover the basic elements of a health and safety management system as described in Step 2: Implementing a Health and Safety Program.

The audit instrument is a written protocol that organizes the audit requirements and procedures into a sequence of steps and specifies the actions to be taken by an auditor. It guides the auditor in evaluating, and scoring points, for specific elements of the health and safety management system being evaluated. The validation techniques used alone, or in combination, include document reviews, personnel interviews and the observation of workplace conditions and practices by the certified auditor.

Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Workplace Partnerships (AHRE) maintains the Partnerships audit standard against which the audit instruments are evaluated and compared. Only those instruments that meet this audit standard will be accepted when carrying out an audit for a COR. Each Certifying Partner has a list of the approved audit instruments that they will accept for review towards a COR.

A sample of the current Partnerships Audit instrument, per AHRE, is provided below.

2. Hazard Identification and Assessment			
Questions	Score	Instructions	Notes
2.1	Has an inventory been taken of jobs? (0-20 points)	Verified by reviewing documentation. A list of employee occupations/jobs should be in place and the various tasks within those occupations/jobs should be identified. Points are awarded based on the percentage of jobs inventoried.	
2.2	Are health and safety hazards identified for the jobs listed in the inventory? Health Hazards? (0-20 points) Safety Hazards? (0-20 points)	Verified by reviewing documentation to determine if there is a system in place to identify hazards from the job inventory (Refer to 2.1). Both health and safety hazards should be identified to ensure that ergonomic risks, exposure to chemicals, noise, heat stress, etc. are addressed. Points are awarded based on the percentage of jobs for which hazards have been identified compared to the total number of jobs identified.	
2.3	Have the health and safety hazards been evaluated according to risk? Health Hazards? (0-20 points) Safety Hazards? (0-20 points)	Verified by reviewing documentation. There must be a system/process for evaluating risk. System should include an assessment of the: ①Potential consequences of exposure to the hazard (severity) ②Likelihood of an incident occurring (probability) ③Degree of exposure to the hazard (frequency) This evaluation could be qualitative (High, Medium, Low, A, B, C,) or quantitative (3, 2, 1). Points are awarded based on the percentage of hazards that have been evaluated compared to the health and safety hazards identified in 2.2.	

2. Hazard Identification and Assessment

Questions		Score	Instructions	Notes
2.4	Are identified health and safety hazards prioritized according to risk? (0-20 points)		Verified by reviewing documentation to determine if there is a system to assess the hazards and rank them from the highest to lowest. Points are awarded based on the percentage of health and safety hazards that are prioritized.	
2.5	Are workers involved in health and safety hazard identification and assessment? (10 points)		Verified by review of hazard assessment documentation and interviewing workers to confirm whether the involvement is meaningful. At least 60% of those interviewed must be aware of worker involvement to award points. Not all workers need to be involved. Worker involvement could be through health and safety committees, teams, safety representatives, projects, pre-job planning, etc.	
2.6	Are key employees trained in the process of hazard identification and assessment? (0-10 points)		Verified by review of documentation and interviewing key employees. Key employees lead the hazard assessment process, team leaders, etc. Score: 0-5 points for documentation 0-5 points for interviews Points are awarded based on the percentage of positive indicators.	
2.7	Are the health and safety hazard assessments reviewed when changes to the operation are implemented? Health Hazards? (0-15 points) Safety Hazards? (0-15 points)		Verified by records review and employee interviews. Documentation may include meeting minutes, supervisor's log book, assessment documents, etc. Changes to the operation could include introduction of new equipment, processes, products, materials, etc. Score: 0-5 points for documentation 0-10 points for interviews Interview points are awarded based on the percentage of positive indicators.	
	Total Points Possible: 170			

Audit Score			
Total points possible	170	- Points not applicable (N/A)	_____ = Total points _____
Total points scored =	<input style="width: 50px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>		
(divided by)	_____	x 100 = FINAL SCORE	_____ %
Total points possible =	<input style="width: 50px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>		

Exhibit 4. Element 2 of the Partnerships in Health and Safety Audit Instrument. ⁴

Employers who are ready to arrange their health and safety management system audit should contact the appropriate Certifying Partner. A list of approved external auditors can also be obtained from each Certifying Partner; each employer is strongly encouraged to review the qualifications, industry experience and other considerations as found in ISO 19011 before retaining the services of an external auditor. A qualified external auditor will also be able to assist the employer with determining the required interview and operation/location sample size (audit scope) as well as the time frame for completing the required activities. The length of time to complete an audit depends upon the size, complexity, and scope of the operations being audited. For example, a medium size employer with less than 50 workers and one location, the audit may take three to four days; the time involved will increase based on the factors listed above. The cost of the audit will vary based on the time involved and the external auditor that is selected.

There are two types of audits that are required under the “Partnerships” program in order to obtain and maintain a COR. The external audit is conducted to obtain the COR, and is also required every three years in order to renew the COR. The auditor selected for an external audit cannot be involved in the development or implementation of the health and safety system being audited as this may place the auditor in a conflict of interest position. To maintain a COR, an employer is required to have a maintenance audit conducted during the first and second calendar years after the COR is issued. If the maintenance audit is not completed by the December 31 of each of these years then the COR will be revoked. A certified external or internal auditor may conduct this audit; an internal auditor may work for the employer being evaluated. Both external and maintenance audits must be reviewed by the Certifying Partner to verify that they meet the quality assurance standards set by AHRE.

All audits conducted for the Partnerships program must meet the following timelines:

- Data collection activities must be completed within 45 days;
- Submission of the audit report to the Certifying Partner within 45 days of completing the data collection activities.

Upon successful completion of the quality assurance review process by the Certifying Partner, the application for the COR, which is completed by the employer, is forwarded by the Certifying Partner to AHRE. The COR is generally issued within 2-4 weeks after the receipt of this application; notification of this achievement is also communicated to the WCB-PIR program.

The Partners in Injury Reduction Program (PIR)

The current WCB-PIR program was revised in 2000 in order to provide additional financial support to AHRE and the “Partnerships in Health and Safety Program”. The aim of the new program is to:

- Encourage the participation of employers in developing health and safety, and disability management programs designed to prevent accidents and reduce workplace injuries;
- Recognize employers who achieve loss reduction targets through premium refunds;
- Strengthen the partnership of the WCB, AHRE, industry and safety associations and employers in injury reduction programs.

The PIR program is the only element of the WCB premium pricing that is voluntary. It is entirely up to the employer to decide whether or not they participate in the program. If an employer decides to participate, then they must agree to fulfill certain obligations as part of the program. This includes conducting a health and safety systems audit, achieving a Certificate of Recognition from AHRE and attending health, safety and disability management courses.

If these obligations are met, then the employer is eligible to earn a rebate on the premiums that have been paid. First-time COR holders may now earn a **10 %** minimum rebate (new for 2005) for the first year of participation. Employers are guaranteed a **5 %** rebate on their premiums every year after as long as they maintain their COR. Based on the continued performance of the employer, which is tracked by WCB, an employer may be entitled up to a **20 %** rebate.

Additional information on the program can be obtained directly from the Alberta Worker’s Compensation Board; refer to the Additional Resources Section.

The Future of the Partnerships Program

After 18 years of challenges and successes within the province of Alberta, the need to expand this program to other provinces within Canada is growing. In 2004, the Petroleum Industry in British Columbia approached the Workers Compensation Board (Work Safe BC) to review and adopt the Partnerships program. A pilot project was run in the same year, and the opportunity for employers in the BC petroleum industry to obtain a BC Certificate of Recognition, along with a 5% assessment rebate is now available. This program is managed through ENFORM, the Certifying Partner for the Canadian Petroleum Industry. Additional information on the BC COR and Worksite Partnership Program (WPP) can be obtained directly at www.enform.ca.

The petroleum industry is also currently lobbying for the Partnerships program to be expanded into the province of Saskatchewan. Discussions between the Certifying Partner, ENFORM and the Saskatchewan government have been initiated, and the opportunity for a pilot project to be run in this province in the next 2 years is a priority for this industry. Inquiries about the Partnerships in Health and Safety program from Eastern Canada, Ontario and even the United States have increased steadily and with time, the success of this Canadian program may be modeled in a number of jurisdictions.

Additional Resources

① **Partnerships in Health and Safety Program:** To obtain the most current information, contact the Partnerships Hot Line (780) 427-8842 or visit our website at www.whs.gov.ab.ca/partners

② **Partners in Injury Reduction:** For more information call 1-866-922-9221 (in Alberta) or 1-800-661-9608 (outside of Alberta). You can also email to contactcentre@wcb.ab.ca or visit the website at www.wc.ab.ca.

Footnotes

1. Alberta Workers Compensation Board. *Backgrounder: Partners in Injury Reduction (PIR) 2004 Program*. www.wcb.ab.ca/news/2005/PIR_bkg.asp.
2. Alberta Workers Compensation Board. *Banking on Safety*. www.wcb.ab.ca/news/2005/050525.asp. May 25, 2005.
3. Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Workplace Partnerships. *Partnerships in Health and Safety - Building an Effective Health and Safety Management System*. Alberta: AHRE, 2005.
4. Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Workplace Partnerships. *Partnerships in Health and Safety Audit Instrument Package*. Alberta: AHRE, 1999.

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a.) Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Workplace Partnerships. *Partnerships in Health and Safety Audit Instrument Package*. Alberta: AHRE, 1999.

b.) (AHRE Section B)

Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Workplace Partnerships. Partnerships Information Bulletin, *Partnerships Audit Standard Final*. Alberta: AHRE, 2001.

a.) Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Workplace Partnerships. *Partnerships in Health and Safety Audit Instrument Package*. Alberta: AHRE, 1999.

b.) (AHRE 3)

Alberta Workers Compensation Board. *Partners in Injury Reduction, PS003*. Alberta: WCB, 2006.

Alberta Workers Compensation Board. Employer Fact Sheet, E-04/15/04, *Partners in Injury Reduction Program Changes*. Alberta: WCB, 2004.

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