



03-2022

PrOHfiles in our CRBOH Members: Jessie Richards, ROHT

Jessie Richards, ROHT works at the Calgary Catholic School District, where she is responsible for managing occupational hygiene for construction, demolition, and facility operations. Jessie attended SAIT (Southern Alberta Institute of Technology), then Royal Roads University, where she studied Environmental Technology. It was in coursework as part of this program that Jessie was introduced to occupational hygiene work. Jessie explains, "I got a summer work program with an occupational health and safety consulting firm that sparked going in that direction instead of environmental consulting."

Jessie worked for Western Health & Safety doing occupational hygiene consulting for a decade. As a consultant, she worked all over western Canada. She was able to work in every sector in the region including small residential remediations, large dam sites, diamond mines, and oil & gas sites.

Now that Jessie has joined the Calgary Catholic School District, she works as the only occupational hygienist in a broader team of occupational health & safety professionals. As she manages occupational hygiene for construction and demolition projects, and facility operations, she is constantly having to balance the concerns of many parties. There is a unique challenge in working in education because construction projects can be ongoing while classes are ongoing. As always, it is important to carefully manage construction hazards, which may include asbestos abatement measures, silica control measures, and infection prevention protocols.

When working in a school district, it is not just workers whose health must be protected, but the health of children that must be considered. Jessie has to ensure to practices implemented protect the health of potentially more vulnerable children. She also has to consider that the practices prevent curious children and teens from accessing the work site when revitalization projects are being done in a school that is inhabited.

Jessie takes pride in exceeding the legislation minimums and adopting best practices when writing specifications for contractors to follow. Although there is sometimes pushback or resistance, ultimately Jessie is confident in being able to manage the projects to ensure the health and safety of students and workers is enforced.

Jessie pursued the ROHT designation because, in her words, "I wanted to have proof of competency. I felt like ROHT was the most well-known route" to demonstrate competency.

When asked about potential issues in occupational exposure, Jessie had some concern that enforcement isn't always done equally in every province, and that might lead to some employers not understanding occupational exposure. As an example, she explains that for a demolition of a building, enforcement is really good in one province but may be up to the employer to do it properly without enforcement in another. Jessie is concerned that differences in enforcement has the potential to allow for exposures to occur when not all employers are aware of the hazards they're working work.

Jessie also identified that workers still may not recognize some very long-standing occupational exposures. She has seen workers not recognize the potential building materials that can contain asbestos

and silica. There is still such a need for occupational hygiene expertise in developing occupational hygiene programs and being on-site for projects.

Written by Krista Thompson, MHSc, ROH, CRSP.

PrOHfiles in our CRBOH Members is an ongoing series profiling those working in Occupational Hygiene as ROHs and ROHTs. Our goal is to highlight the many different routes to Occupational Hygiene and the variety of sectors we work in. If you'd like to nominate someone (or yourself!) to be PrOHfiled, please email Krista Thompson at krista.thompson@gmail.com.