



---

# Occupational and Environmental Health Nurses

## CODE OF ETHICS

---

### Preamble

The American Association of Occupational Health Nurses, Inc. (AAOHN) recognizes the “American Nurses Association (ANA) Code of Ethics for Nurses” as foundational to nurses in all roles, settings and practices, and has used the ANA Code of Ethics with Interpretive Statements as a model for licensed nurses in the practice of occupational and environmental health. The AAOHN Code of Ethics for Nurses (The Code) augments standards of nursing care, providing a non-negotiable ethical framework for decision-making and evaluation of nursing actions as occupational and environmental health nurses (OHNs) fulfill their professional responsibilities to society and the profession within their licensed scope of practice. The Code is a statement of the ethical values, obligations, duties and professional principles of occupational and environmental health nurses individually and collectively.

The Code is based on the belief that the goal of occupational and environmental health nurses is to promote the health and safety of the worker, workers’ families/significant others, worker populations, community groups and employers. The needs of these groups sometimes conflict. The OHN is responsible for balancing these needs while actively advocating on the behalf of all parties. Occupational and environmental health nursing practice focuses on promotion and restoration of health, prevention of illness and injury and protection from occupational and environmental hazards. The occupational and environmental nurse has a unique role to protect the integrity of the workplace and the work environment.

I. The American Association of Occupational Health Nurses (AAOHN) articulates

occupational and environmental health nursing values, maintains the integrity of our specialty practice area and the nursing profession, and integrates principles of social justice into nursing and health policy. As such AAOHN:

- Envisions workplace and community environments that are healthy and safe.
- Carries out its’ mission by advancing the specialty practice through innovative professional and leadership development, networking, and career opportunities.
- Advocates for legislation, regulations, and public policy that positively impact the occupational and environmental health nursing specialty.
- Promotes the occupational and environmental health nursing specialty through marketing and public relations campaigns that emphasize the value of its members to private employers, government, professional, and other business and professional groups i.e. CDC, NIOSH, SHRM, ACOEM, ANOHP, and AIHA among others.
- Collaborates with other professional nursing organizations i.e. ANA, the Nursing Organizations Alliance, and ABOHN among others to promote understanding of the occupational and environmental health nursing specialty’s role and influence on domestic and global workers’ health and safety.

II. The occupational and environmental health nurse (OHN) practices with compassion and respect for the inherent dignity, worth, and unique attributes of every person. In this capacity the OHN:

- Recognizes all persons hold a variety of beliefs and values influenced by different backgrounds, cultures, and community or work environments.
  - Provides services based on respect for each individual's beliefs, value system, and autonomy.
  - Provides health care and occupational health and safety services without neglecting clients even when they refuse help or personal convictions conflict with the client's needs.
  - Recognizes there are times when the rights and obligations of society outweigh those of the individual and require decisions based on the risk of harm or endangerment to all concerned including the public's health.
- III. The occupational and environmental health nurse's (OHN) primary commitment is to the client, whether an individual, group, community, or population. As such the OHN:
- Works independently as prescribed by scope of license but collaborates with other occupational health and safety professionals, employers, and workers to plan and deliver services that promote health and protect clients from injury and illness.
  - Cooperates with professionals from other health and safety professions, human resources, medical benefits, rehabilitation services, workers' compensation boards, healthcare providers, or vendors to reduce absenteeism, presenteeism, and lost work time due to injury or illness.
- IV. The occupational and environmental health nurse (OHN) promotes, advocates for, and protects the rights, health, and safety of the client. In this role, the OHN:
- Maintains the confidentiality of personal and health information of clients and protects the privacy rights of workers' personal identifiable information as prescribed by local, state, federal and international guidelines, policies regulations and laws.
  - Develops and routinely updates written policies and procedures guiding access, release, transmission, and storage of personal and health information, including electronic records;
- Respects and protects the rights and privacy of research participants including obtaining voluntary informed consent;
  - Strives to protect clients, the nursing profession, and the specialty practice of occupational and environmental health nursing from incompetent professionals and individuals who misrepresent themselves, by reporting to appropriate authorities all persons who exhibit incompetent, unethical or illegal actions.
- V. The occupational and environmental health nurse (OHN) has authority, accountability, and responsibility for nursing practice; makes decisions; and takes action consistent with the obligation to prevent illness and injury, promote health, and provide optimal health care. As such, the OHN:
- Adheres to all laws and statutes (local, state, federal, and international) including those that govern occupational and environmental health nursing practice;
  - Upholds professional codes and current practice standards;
  - Refers or delegates to appropriate professions or health services.
- VI. The occupational and environmental health nurse (OHN) owes the same duties to self as to others, including the responsibility to promote health and safety, preserve wholeness of character and integrity, maintain competence, and continue personal and professional growth. The OHN:
- Acknowledges the importance of life-long learning including continuing and advanced educational activities and use of evidence based research to maintain competence in practice ;
  - Strives for excellence in all endeavors, by maintaining a level of knowledge, judgment, technical skills, and professional values necessary for delivering quality health services;
  - Is accountable for actions that comply with nurse practice acts, standards of practice and other laws or regulations governing occupational and environmental health nursing practice;
  - Collaborates to develop policies that promote competent, ethical, and legal nursing practice;

VII. The occupational and environmental health nurse (OHN), through individual and collective effort, establishes, maintains, and improves the ethical environment of the work setting and conditions of employment that are conducive to safe, quality health care. In this role, the OHN:

- Advocates for and protects all persons' rights to a safe, healthy and ethical work environment;
- Demonstrates impartiality, fairness, and objectivity when resolving personal and workplace conflicts;
- Uses evidence based conflict resolution strategies to manage issues and situations that create conflict between management and the client.

VIII. Occupational and environmental health nurses (OHN) help advance the nursing profession and our specialty practice through research and scholarly inquiry, professional standards development, and the generation of nursing and health policy. As such OHNs:

- Collaborate with other occupational health and safety professionals to identify the most critical issues that affect the health and safety of workers, the work environment, and communities;
- Conduct scientific research projects congruent with the National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA);
- Evaluate quality improvement projects to advance workplace health and safety;
- Demonstrate ethical responsibility in the conduct of research and scholarly inquiry;
- Contribute to best evidence in occupational health and safety through honest conduct, reporting, and dissemination of research reports, quality improvement projects, literature reviews, and theoretical discussions;
- Collaborate with other occupational health and safety professionals to analyze critical issues in workplace health and safety and develop health policy to protect workers, the work environment, and the community.

IX. The occupational and environmental health nurse (OHN) collaborates with other health professionals and the public to protect human rights, promote health, and reduce health disparities. The OHN:

- Seeks to promote adequate distribution of occupational health and safety services

and health care resources to meet clients' needs;

- Recognizes and acts to address issues and dilemmas affecting the health, safety, and welfare of society;
- Delivers education and training about work hazards, methods to decrease work hazards and prevent harm, and the OSHA or MSHA standards that apply to their workplace in a language and vocabulary workers can understand;
- Offers health education, health counseling or coaching, and health promotion activities in a language and vocabulary workers can understand;
- Works within communities to eliminate health disparities by advocating for access to health care and strong educational systems.

*(1977, Revised 1991, 1996, 2004, 2009, and March 2016)  
AAOHN Practice Committee*