

What Works—Alberta

Health & Safety Edition

Winter 2008



Recognizing Innovation in Workplace Health and Safety

Workplace health and safety is always an important element in Alberta's workplaces, and promoting a safe and healthy workplace is a key action in the Premier's plan to improve the quality of life in the province. Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry works to ensure safe and healthy workplaces through legislation, partnerships and education.

Last year saw fewer workplace deaths, disabling injuries and lost-time claims in Alberta, latest health and safety statistics show.

Annual awards and certificates of recognition are presented to Alberta workplaces that show outstanding accomplishment in the area of workplace health and safety.

"This trend highlights the positive effect of government working in partnership with industry and employees to create a culture of workplace safety," says the Honourable Iris Evans, Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry.

Even with the excellent progress to date, we need to continue focusing on our vision of a healthy and injury-free work environment, especially when we consider that the last few years have seen a drastic increase in the number of young and inexperienced workers entering injury-prone industries with little understanding of job safety. This means a continued focus on workplace safety and implementing strategies that are effective at reducing workplace injuries and illnesses. **W**

Welcome to Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry's *What Works-Alberta* newsletter. This edition will focus on the proactive leadership role that provincial industry, safety and labour partners are taking to increase safety education and injury prevention on the job. The articles will describe effective practices, innovative programs and products being developed to engage all workers, especially younger workers, in workplace health and safety training.

The *What Works-Alberta* newsletter provides opportunities for Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry staff, service providers and partners to learn and share effective practices related to the programs and services of the Department.

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For more information on effective practices or the What Works newsletter, please contact:

Karina Thompson

E-Scanning Analyst

Organizational Planning and Effectiveness Branch

Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry

6th Floor Labour Building, 10808 - 99 Avenue

Edmonton, Alberta T5K 0G5

Phone: (780) 415-1110 or call toll free at 310-0000

Fax: (780) 415-2477

Email: karina.thompson@gov.ab.ca

Myles Morris

Acting Executive Director

Organizational Planning and Effectiveness Branch

Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry

6th Floor Labour Building, 10808 - 99 Avenue

Edmonton, Alberta T5K 0G5

Phone: (780) 422-0766 or call toll free at 310-0000

Fax: (780) 415-2477

Email: myles.morris@gov.ab.ca

What Works-Alberta is a newsletter by the Organizational Planning and Effectiveness Branch of the Strategic Services and Information Division of Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry. To find current and past editions of the *What Works-Alberta* newsletter, visit our webpage at <http://employment.alberta.ca/cps/rde/xchg/hre/hs.xml/3407.html>.

Work Safe Alberta eLearning Programs: Point and Click Learning

Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry (AEII) has developed several interactive, web-based programs designed to increase awareness about workplace health and safety issues. Users increase their awareness of Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) legislation, workplace hazards, incident investigation and the effects of shiftwork through the click of a mouse. The programs are visually appealing and intuitive, and the information is straightforward and pertinent.

For example, the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Legislation Awareness program guides employers and workers through a step-by-step look at the *Occupational Health and Safety Act, Regulation and Code*. Users manipulate the program through user friendly icons and pop-ups provide quick snapshots of the legislation. The program ends with an opportunity to check your understanding.

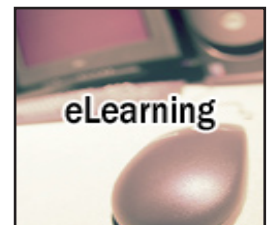
While visually similar to the legislation awareness program, the Hazard Assessment and Control program focuses on identification, assessment and control of workplace hazards, which is specifically required under the OHS legislation. The Incident Investigation program helps the user identify the root causes of workplace incidents and put controls in place to prevent future problems. The Shiftwork and Fatigue program offers tips to workers about handling the impact of shiftwork.

Three new eLearning programs have been developed: basic ergonomics, workplace health and safety for schools, and impairment in the workplace. All programs are available as CD-roms or web versions.

Melinda Yiu, Technical Communications Specialist for AEII says that "nearly every user surveyed would recommend the eLearning programs to others because they are practical and easy to use," and further notes that the e-Learning program has been receiving a lot of attention. "Interest in the programs has been expressed from other provinces and countries, from as far away as Australia and Turkey," says Yiu.

For more information on the Work Safe Alberta eLearning programs contact, Sharon Chadwick, Senior Manager Workplace Health and Safety Program Planning, Research and Audit, AEII at (780) 422-8185 or email

sharon.l.chadwick@gov.ab.ca or Melinda Yiu, Effective Practices Specialist, Workplace Innovation and Continuous Improvement, AEII at (780) 422-8188 or email melinda.yiu@gov.ab.ca. **W**



The Perils and Promise of Nanotechnology

The rapid growth of nanotechnology is driving a technological transformation akin to the computing revolution of the 20th century. Nanotechnology, the science of manipulating things more than 100,000 times smaller than the width of a human hair, is expected to have a profound impact in the fields of medicine, energy, information technology, transportation, environmental protection and consumer products.

While nanotechnology is rapidly advancing, with more than 500 nanoproducts already on the market, concerns have been raised that nano-sized materials could potentially lead to unforeseen health or environmental hazards. At such a small scale, nanomaterials can exhibit entirely new and unpredictable characteristics. Of more concern is the growing body of science that is showing the potential for certain nanomaterials to be toxic to humans or the environment.

To address some of these concerns, the National Institute for Nanotechnology (NINT) opened its doors last summer on the University of Alberta campus, with a \$53 million building housing \$40 million worth of leading edge microscopes and other instrumentation, as well as, some of the best researchers in the world. In addition, the Government of Alberta has set aside \$130 million over the next five years for the development of nanotechnology.

Currently, Canada has no nanotechnology specific health and safety policy.

“However, using the same stringent controls as you would for any other potentially hazardous material provides a good starting point for anyone dealing with any sort of nanomaterials. As we find out more about the risks and dangers, better preventive measures and policies can be developed,” says Greg Nilsson, the Occupational Health and Safety Officer for NINT.

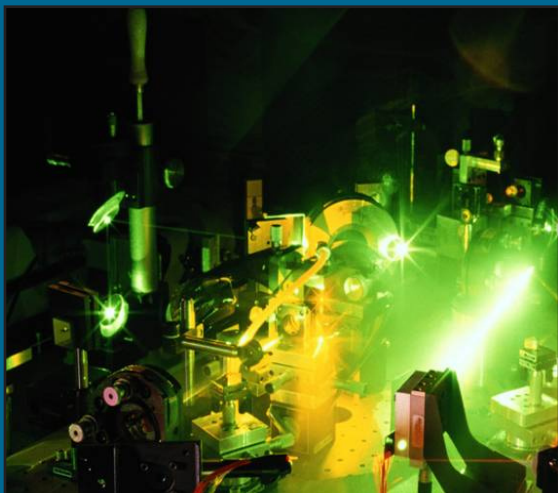
Nilsson notes that nanotechnology has been used in industries since 1950 (although at the time it was not understood that the materials were really nano in nature), and the threat of possible harm, whether real or imagined, will require sound, independent and authoritative information on what the risks are and how to avoid them.

With this in mind, it is important to review current health and safety policies toward nanotechnology as well as understand the behavior and potential risks of these materials once released into the environment.

For more information on Nanotechnology safety issues contact, Greg Nilsson, Occupational Health and Safety Officer, National Institute of Nanotechnology at (780) 902-9792 or email gregory.nilsson@nrc-cnrc.gc.ca. **W**



Gregory Nilsson, Occupational Health and Safety Officer, NINT



A team of experts writing for *Nature*, a prominent scientific journal, have drawn up the following five major challenges for the scientific community to evaluate the safety of nanotechnology over the next 15 years:

1. Develop instruments to measure nanomaterials in air and water.
2. Determine ways to test the toxicity of nanomaterials.
3. Generate models to predict the impact of nanomaterials on the environment and human health.
4. Develop methods to assess the impact of nanomaterials over their entire lifetime.
5. Organize programs to research nanomaterials.

Work Safe Alberta Passport: A Permanent Record of Training

To raise awareness of workplace health and safety issues among young workers before they enter the workforce, Alberta Education and Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry developed the innovative Work Safe Passport to record workplace health and safety training received by Alberta students and workers.

Often young workers are not aware of the hazards associated with their job, do not know the right questions to ask, and do not know their rights and responsibilities related to workplace health and safety. While the aim of the Work Safe Passport is to record recognized workplace health and safety training received by younger workers, it can also assist with raising awareness so that their risk of work related injury, illness or death is reduced before entering the workforce.



Teachers are in a unique position to help students meet this challenge and are encouraged to introduce the Work Safe Passport to students during classroom health and safety training. For instance, high school students who complete any workplace health and safety course can get their Work Safe Passport stamped with the necessary information regarding the training received and then continue to use it throughout their working career.

Although the main target of the Work Safe Passport is employees and employers, its use is picking up with schools across the province. Since March 2007, there have been nearly 20,000 requests for passports from industry and schools.

For more information on the Work Safe Passport program contact Cailín Mills, Effective Practices Specialist, Workplace Innovation and Continuous Improvement, AEII at (780) 422-6221 or email cailin.mills@gov.ab.ca. **W**

The Work Safe Passport is free of charge for both students and industry workers. To promote awareness, Alberta Employment Immigration and Industry sent its staff to teacher and safety conferences around Alberta. For more information about how to order Work Safe Passports, call the Alberta Employment Immigration and Industry workplace health and safety contact center at 1-866-415-8960 (in Edmonton 415-8690).

Retail Alberta Promotes Young Worker Safety

The largest number of young workers—26 per cent—work in retail and wholesale, and another 16 per cent in accommodation and food services. These workers can be subject to injuries ranging from back strains to burns and scalds, or even harassment by customers.

“It is generally a much younger demographic in retail than you would find in construction. We are working very closely with our members and government to emphasize the importance of health and safety training,” says Sibeal McCourt-Bincoletto, CEO of Retail Alberta, an association of provincial retailers.

The following best practices have been effective for employers of young workers:

- Consider mentoring or a buddy program that pairs young workers with older, experienced ones.
- Ensure your training materials fit the audience.
- Don't talk down to young workers.
- Repeat training and reminders are often useful.
- Talk about incidents with young workers and explain how and why they happened.
- Make young workers aware of their rights as employees.
- Delegate and identify a contact person, who is easily accessible. **W**

Adapted from “Young and Inexperienced Workers” by Norma Ramage, Occupational Health & Safety, May 2007.

Young and Inexperienced Workers: They're Our Responsibility

In 2006, workers aged 15 to 24 accounted for 23.4 per cent of workplace injuries in the province, although they represented only 17.6 per cent of the labour force. This statistic is even more disturbing when you consider that young people generally work more part-time jobs and shorter hours overall, and therefore, have less exposure to workplace hazards.

Cailín Mills, effective practices specialist with Workplace Innovation and Continuous Improvement, says her organization's research has identified a number of reasons why young workers are more at risk than their older, more experienced counterparts. Among them:

- inexperience,
- a feeling of invincibility and a belief that nothing bad can happen to them,
- frequent job changes, leaving little time for proper training,
- an eagerness to impress employers and prove themselves, and
- lack of awareness of their rights as workers.

Communicating with young workers at a level and in a way they can relate to is critical. That's why a new awareness poster and information campaign from Workplace Health & Safety uses the tagline, "What are you working for? Stay safe to enjoy the stuff that matters." Mills says employers should remember that training manuals and print materials used by previous generations may not be appropriate for a generation brought up on



electronics. Instead, she says, consider videos and Internet-based point-and-click training and information programs.

The approach with young workers at the Edmonton sheet metal manufacturing firm Prairie Metal Industries Inc. is not to lecture, but to interact with them. It gives specific examples of incidents that can happen, incidents that are specific to their age group. At Sears Canada's Calgary National Logistics Centre constant communication with young workers is the key to safety. Approach safety in terms that will resonate with them.



In addition, the Sears Canada National Logistics Centre uses a "buddy" training program where experienced employees provide newcomers with theoretical classroom instruction and daily one-on-one support from the moment they walk in the door. Edmonton's Black Cat Blades uses a "shadowing" program, where new employees get a comprehensive three-day health and safety orientation. In the two-to-three-week training program that follows, new employees work alongside the people they have been shadowing, learning to do the job themselves.

Cailín Mills says that despite the training difficulties young workers sometimes present, they really do want that training. Safety training indicates to young people that regardless of age or job experience, they are valued. When young workers feel valued by their employer, they are more likely to stay on the job. Understanding the factors involved in hiring young workers will help employers design more effective health and safety programs. As Mills mentions, "If we focus on this young group now, as they move on in their working lives, we can start a safety culture change." **W**

Adapted from "Young and Inexperienced Workers" by Norma Ramage, Occupational Health & Safety, May 2007.

The Partnerships in Health and Safety Program: Creating a Safe Workplace for Alberta Business and Industry

By actively promoting health and safety in the workplace, employers send a message to their staff that they are valued. The Partnerships in Health and Safety (Partnerships) Program was created to enable employers to take a proactive leadership role in workplace health and safety. While participating in this innovative program, partners actively build systems in their workplaces to minimize the incidence of injury and illness to their employees.

These health and safety management systems are then reviewed, and a Certificate of Recognition (COR) is awarded to any employer who meets Partnerships standards. To date, more than 6,200 employers participating in the program have successfully received a COR. The COR is issued jointly by Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry (AEII), Workplace Partnerships and a Certifying Partner committed to the program.



“Since 1989, the Partnerships in Health and Safety Program has been encouraging employers to develop health and safety management systems in their workplaces. This is accomplished through commitment by management, hazard identification and control, training, inspection, incident reporting and investigation, and emergency response planning,” says Karen Kruselnicki, Partnerships Consultant, AEII.



Employee buy-in is vital to the program, so employers get their employees involved in setting up their own health and safety management systems. Eliminating injuries is a smart move financially, but it's also a way to value employees.

For more information on the Partnerships Program contact, Karen Kruselnicki, Partnerships Consultant, AEII at (780) 644-4688 or email karen.kruselnicki@gov.ab.ca. **W**

What is the Occupational Health and Safety Act?

Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Act (Act) is a law that sets out the basic duties and obligations of employers and workers to promote the health and safety of workers throughout the province.

The *Act* states that employers and workers should concern themselves with safe workplaces, adequate training, and enforcement of safety regulations. The government's role is to make sure that the rules are followed to prevent work-related incidents, injuries and illnesses, and to make sure Albertans are educated about workplace health and safety.

What is an Occupational Health and Safety Officer?

Fair, safe and healthy workplaces help keep the province prosperous and protect the well-being of Alberta's labour force. Employment, Immigration and Industry (EII) continues to develop and monitor employment standards, occupational health and safety and labour relations legislation to keep workplaces fair and safe.

One of the resources EII uses to monitor workplaces is the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Officer, who visits places of employment to detect unsafe or unhealthy working conditions. OHS officers receive extensive training on current health and safety legislation to fully understand the rights and responsibilities of employers and workers. EII employs 83 officers in Alberta to assist employers in complying with health and safety legislation.

According to Gerry Wagner, a manager with the Workplace Health and Safety Compliance Programs Investigation Unit, officers conduct inspections in all industry sectors (except farming and ranching) and have been granted the authority to enforce the legislation. This means

that OHS officers work to educate employers and workers about their respective responsibilities under the legislation. “Officers can give a stop work order to stop a particularly dangerous job, or they can issue a stop use tag if equipment is deemed dangerous,” says Wagner.

As many young and inexperienced workers enter the labour force, there is a greater need for EII to provide tools and support to educate employers and employees about health and safety in the workplace. Occupational Health and Safety Officers are paying special attention to workers aged 18-25 because young workers historically have the highest injury rates. The program continues to be a model for other jurisdictions across Canada.

For more information on the Occupational Health and Safety Officers, contact Gerry Wagner, Manager, Compliance Programs Workplace Health and Safety, EII at (780) 422-6205 or email gerry.wagner@gov.ab.ca. **W**

The Spirit Toolkit: Aboriginal Workers Education and Outreach Program

In early 2005, the Spirit Toolkit outreach project was created by the Manitoba Federation of Labour to integrate Aboriginal sacred teachings with worker rights and increase Aboriginal understanding of workplace health and safety issues.

The toolkit is a collection of resources based on tradition, equating the seven Aboriginal teachings of Respect, Humility, Love, Truth, Honesty, Courage and Wisdom with the three rights of workers - to know about workplace hazards, to participate in health and safety committees, and to refuse unsafe work. A DVD that builds on the seven sacred teachings will soon be available.

As part of the Toolkit, participants in a Sharing Circle are invited to share a story about a time when they felt misunderstood in the workplace. The toolkit also offers a board game and puzzle based on the medicine wheel designed to support the learning experiences within the Sharing Circle.

The Spirit Toolkit has received a tremendous response. Over the past two years, the project has proven to be successful in engaging Aboriginal workers to the point where other provinces and countries are looking to the Spirit Toolkit for inspiration. Diana Ludwick, Project Coordinator, emphasizes that the Spirit Toolkit continues to evolve, and feedback is encouraged to help develop a better resource.

For more information on or to request the Spirit Toolkit, contact Diana Ludwick Aboriginal Workers Education & Outreach Project at (204) 926-7903 or email aweop@mfohc.mb.ca. **W**



A Working Alone Safety System: A Mouse Click Away

The University of Lethbridge has created a web-based Working Alone Log-in System that helps campus security monitor the safety of faculty, staff and students who may be working alone on campus. The system allows users to feel safe knowing that help is a mouse click away.

Users log into the system, providing the security department with their location, estimated departure time and the phone number of the room that they are in. In the case of an emergency, security could monitor who is present on campus and quickly respond.



Bill Krysak, security supervisor for the University of Lethbridge security system, explains that the system was created to increase the awareness and safety of anyone working alone on campus. "While patrolling campus, security officers may check in on people who have logged in to the Working Alone System to ensure everyone is okay," says Mr. Krysak. The system gives people peace of mind that help is nearby if needed.

A link to the Working Alone Log-in System is prominently located on the home page of the University of Lethbridge website. The system is accessible to all students logging into any computer on campus. The security department gets numerous logins per week and is continuing to get the message out to more people on campus.

For more information on the University of Lethbridge Work Alone Log-in System, contact Bill Krysak, Security Supervisor, University of Lethbridge at (403) 329-2603 or email krysak@uleth.ca. **W**

Alberta Farm Safety Program: It's No Accident



In 2006, 20 Albertans were killed in farm related accidents, many of them preventable. Agricultural safety and rural health is the focus of the Farm Safety Program, which was created by Alberta Agriculture and Food to promote effective injury prevention among agricultural organizations and the private sector. The program encourages farm families and workers to make informed decisions about managing personal risk.

The first step in this program was the Farm Accident Monitoring System (FAMS), which collects data from participating hospitals on farm related accidents in Alberta. This data provides a picture of the amount and type of accidents occurring on farms each year and helps governing organizations focus on accident prevention. Today, approximately 70 hospitals report to FAMS.

The Farm Safety Program promotes safety through newsletters, educational resources and innovative programs aimed at both children and adults. Laurel Aitken, Farm Safety Program Coordinator for Alberta Agriculture and Food and Rural Development, explains that many programs focus on children and farm safety because it will educate them for a safer future. Children can join the Farm Safety Kid's Club and receive newsletters and promotional safety items. Resources available for educational events include the interactive Farm Safety Hazard Hunt Display and the Gravity Flow Wagon, a miniature grain wagon that teaches children about the dangers of flowing grain.

The new Farm Safety-It's No Accident resource for teens and adults is available as a CD or DVD. Many displays are also available on loan for community and educational events, as well as fact sheets on topics ranging from pesticides to toxic gases.

For more information on the Farm Safety Program, contact Laurel Aitken, Farm Safety Program Coordinator, Alberta Agriculture and Food at (780) 427-4231 or email laurel.aitken@gov.ab.ca. **W**

Share Your Success Story!

What Works-Alberta invites you to share your effective practices. We define practices as being activities, procedures, techniques, approaches, concepts, philosophies, policies or programs. An effective practice is a practice that has been shown to have worked in achieving a desired result. Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry (EII) works to identify effective practices related to EII's programs, and provides opportunities for staff, service providers and partners to learn from and share their success stories. Below is a guide to help compile information about your effective practices. We hope this makes it easier to identify and share "what worked" with readers.

Your idea for a future article or effective practice submission can be emailed to WhatWorks.Alberta@gov.ab.ca.

- Please provide the name of the practice. (Examples of a practice are; a project, program, policy, technique, procedure, approach, activity or concept)

- Describe the problem, situation or issue that gave rise to the practice. (What need is the practice addressing)
- Outline when the practice was first implemented.
- Explain what worked well in the practice.
- Describe the benefit (or good) that has come about to either the client or organization as a result of the practice.
- Please provide measures of the success of the practice. The data presented as evidence should demonstrate; a track record over time, link back to the problem, situation or issue the practice was trying to address and can be either quantitative or qualitative or both.
- Has the practice been recognized by others to be effective? If yes, describe the type(s) of recognition received. (E.g., awards, positive feedback from users, adoption of the practice by others, positive evaluation study).
- Please identify the key contact for this project. **W**