# Laying a Foundation for Success

## Solutions to prevent and manage the new wave of workplace health and safety issues

Recently, issues like workplace mental health, workplace violence, as well as managing aggressive responsive behaviours are fast becoming major issues for Canadian employers. The effects of all are costly to both the worker and organization. Organizations are asking themselves what they need to do to the environment to implement and see success with a program. Where do they start to garner support and to inspire and unite workers in an attempt to bring about meaningful change?

The first step is laying the foundation for success in the area of physical and psychological occupational health and safety. Identifying the risks, controlling the hazards, and ensuring workplaces have the necessary tools to meet legislative requirements are all part of aligning with the work environment, as well as the culture and system within an organization. Endorsing local participation, allowing people to come together to discuss the cause or problem and to work collaboratively to devise strategies or methods for action, will be how workplaces embrace a participatory approach to health and safety.

There are many different means and approaches to which participation can be applied in the workplace. A tiered approach requires a change team to identify and analyze relevant issues and to propose, implement, or monitor potential solutions. Training and education is then part of the implementation process and will help build capacity to tackle the issues.

### Mental Health -**Psychosocial Hazards**

Workplace mental health encompasses conditions that affect the psychological and physical wellbeing of people and are impacted by two factors: what workers bring with them to the workplace, and what the workplace does to employees once they are there. Change ingredients that encompass communication, management support, and leadership are all ways to effectively support a healthy work environment. Establishing and implementing change targets will assist with coercive and participative change, along with engaging change teams to start building on a culture of psychological health and safety.

A big part of change is helping to reduce the stigma, especially in sectors like emergency services, where occupational stress injuries and depression are a growing concern. Many emergency services organizations have prevention policies and programs in place; yet, despite these, stigma around mental health in the workplace continues and many workers do not get the support they need. From a systemic perspective, a focus on mental health awareness, prevention tactics, and evidence-based approaches to trauma reduction are essential to address the problems being faced by emergency services personnel. Such an approach will assist first responders to develop personal strategies and coping mechanisms for the stress and cumulative effects of the many traumatic incidents they encounter. Professional

associations are holding forums, building relationships, coordinating efforts with partners, and identifying potential areas of collaboration. From this, the proper programs, tools, and support can be determined for the future.

#### **Workplace Violence**

First of all, it is important to note that workplace violence (WPV) is underreported. It is likely that more workers are injured on the job due to violence than are indicated by statistics. In response to the escalating issue of WPV, provincial governments are taking action. Ontario, for example, passed Bill 168 which made significant legislative changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA). The bill, which went into effect in June 2010, strengthens protection for workers from violence, harassment, and domestic violence that occur in the workplace. The legislation also helped to form a definition of WPV.

The Public Services Health and Safety Association has developed a toolkit of effective solutions, resources, and



MONICA SZABO is Executive Director, Government, Municipal & Public Safety for the Public Services Health and Safety Association. With 26 years' experience in environmental health and safety, Monica has developed results-oriented solutions for the

public sector. Monica is a Registered Occupational Hygienist (ROH), Canadian Registered Safety Professional (CRSP), and a ABIH/BCSP Certified Occupational Health and Safety Technologist (OHST).

Figure 1 **Turnkey Soluition to Fatigue Management** 



tools that can guide users to develop a plan, organize efforts to conform to evidence-based recommendations, or meet evidence-based, specific practice standards. The toolkit provides workplaces with consistent, consensus-based, and validated resources and solutions that are scalable and can be implemented across sectors. By providing resources based on the best available evidence, employers can be better prepared for their responsibilities in workplace health and safety, and in turn support their workers.

## Managing Aggressive Responsive Behaviours

A respectful workplace is a safe place for everyone. Workplace violence prevention is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive approach and input from a variety of experts. Key areas to be addressed include: system and leadership accountability; organizational culture and leadership; effective

knowledge translation mechanisms to sustain knowledge and change behaviours; patient/client risk assessment and flagging; policies and procedures that comprehensively address root causes of workplace violence; and evaluation of impact.

Through partnerships, a model and toolkit will provide workplaces with a validated, consistent, scalable, and consensus-based approach that can be implemented across sectors to substantially reduce incidents of aggressive responsive behaviours.

#### **Fatigue**

Fatigue is an emerging health and safety hazard that presents an unsafe condition in the workplace; and, like any other risk factor, fatigue can be managed. Customizing the general approaches in a health and safety management system can help address risks associated with fatigue in the workplace.

A fatigue risk management system<sup>1</sup> may include:

- ► a fatigue management policy;
- fatigue risk management, including collecting information on fatigue as a hazard, analyzing its risk, and instigating controls to mitigate that risk:
- a fatigue reporting system for employees;
- ► a fatigue incident investigation;
- fatigue management training and education for employees, management, and families;
- sleep disorder management; and
- a process for the internal and external auditing of the fatigue risk management system that delivers corrective actions through a continuous improvement process.

Figure 1 illustrates requirements to manage fatigue in the workplace. A multi-faceted approach to address all the elements in the health and safety management system is critical to the successful implementation of any new program.

#### **Desired Results**

Critical components of a successful health and safety change process are:

- internal responsibility system framework (IRS);
- health and safety (H&S) management framework;
- leadership commitment and focus;and
- culture of health and safety.

Why an IRS? – through an IRS framework, employer and employee work together in a participative approach and are jointly responsible for occupational health and safety in the organization.

Why an H&S framework? – A health and safety management system involves the introduction of processes designed to decrease the incidence of injury and illness and provides a sys-

<sup>1</sup> Fatigue Risk Management in the Workplace, ACOEM Presidential Task Force on Fatigue Risk Management: Steven E. Lerman, MD, MPH; Evamaria Eskin, MD, MPH; David J. Flower, MBBS, MD; Eugenia C. George, MD; Benjamin Gerson, MD; Natalie Hartenbaum, MD, MPH; Steven R. Hursh, PhD; and Martin Moore-Ede, MD, PhD.

tems approach for addressing health and safety hazards.

Why leadership commitment and focus? – Successful implementation requires management commitment, effective resource allocation, and employee support and participation.

Why a safety culture? – Benefits of implementing a culture of health and safety will mean increased work satisfaction, along with decreased absenteeism and overtime. This means increased productivity and quality of service.

### Establishing an Effective Health and Safety Management System

The roadmap to success will be to establish an effective health and safety management system that includes the following management system pillars:

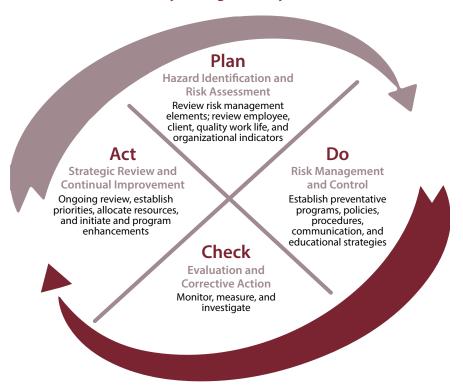
- leadership and commitment;
- hazard identification and risk assessment;
- risk management and control;
- evaluation and corrective action; and
- strategic review and continual improvement.

Once these pillars are established, workplaces can begin to fill gaps between knowledge and evidence available across various sectors by providing optimal solutions for managing these types of issues within the workplace.

Figure 2 outlines the recommended health and safety management system framework. It allows an organization to implement change in manageable pieces.

The responsibility for a safe and healthy workplace falls on every person in the workplace, to the degree they have the authority and ability to exercise it. Through a participatory approach, workplace stakeholders become

Figure 2 **Health and Safety Management System Framework** 



**Plan** – Recognize opportunity to improve health and safety, and plan a change to reach that goal.

**Do** – Implement and test the change.

**Check** – Review the implementation and elements of the program, analyze the results, and identify learnings.

**Act** – Take action based on learnings in the "Do" step. If the change did not work, go through the cycle again with a different plan. Incorporate what you learned from the test into wider changes. Use what you learned to plan new improvements, beginning the cycle again.

actively involved in the recognition, assessment, and control of workplace issues. This approach usually begins as a grassroots movement that ultimately integrates health and safety into all aspects of work. Once embedded into the core of business operations, the participatory approach becomes a "way of

working life," creating greater sense of community and an opportunity to shift organizational safety culture. MW

2 M. C. Haims and P. Carayon (1998), "Theory and practice for the implementation of 'inhouse,' continuous improvement participatory ergonomic programs," *Applied Ergonomics*, 29: pp. 461-472 at 462.

as published in



CANADA'S MUNICIPAL MAGAZINE - SINCE 1891

1-888-368-6125

www.municipalworld.com