

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

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.

## Mental Health – Psychosocial Hazards

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

## Workplace Violence

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 industry. Monica is a Registered Occupational Hygienist (CROH), Canadian Registered Safety Professional (CSP), and a ABH/BCSP Certified Occupational Health and Safety Technologist (OHST).

Figure 1

## Turnkey Solution to Fatigue Management



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-

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.

<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

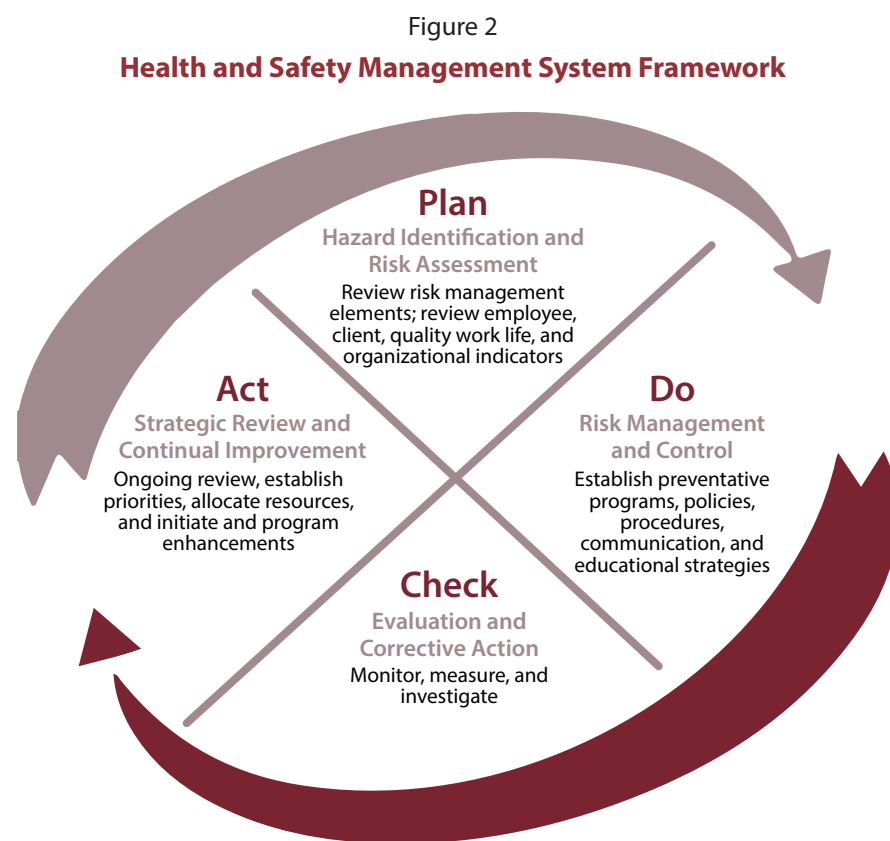
The roadmap to success will be to establish an effective health and safety management system that includes the following management system pillars:

- ▶ 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



**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,”<sup>2</sup> 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 ‘in-house,’ continuous improvement participatory ergonomic programs,” *Applied Ergonomics*, 29: pp. 461-472 at 462.

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