

# THE REAL COST OF SAFETY

By Sherry Knight, President and CEO, Dimension 11 Ltd.



The Conference Board of Canada suggests absenteeism costs the Canadian economy more than \$16 billion yearly. They also indicate the average full-time employee was absent for 9.3 days in 2011. This is based only on lost hours on the job – it does not include anything about finding a replacement, delays, missed deadlines or a reduction in employee morale.

The reasons given ranged from illness to long-term leave of absences. Did you know the province of Saskatchewan has the highest absenteeism rates, averaging 11 days per year, of all Canadian regions? To stop absenteeism based on injury means employers must adhere to provincial safety regulations. With this in your back pocket, you can then begin to explore how to keep your workplace as safe as possible. Following these suggestions might be beneficial:

- Discuss the impact of safety on the

health and welfare of all employees in staff meetings.

- Designate one employee as a health and safety officer – this may be their full-time job or even something off the side of their desk.
- Remember, in Saskatchewan, if you have 10 or more workers you must have a worker/management occupational health committee (if you are a high-hazard workplace you must have an occupational health and safety representative if you have five to nine workers).
- Show employees the dollar cost of an unsafe practice from a company perspective and from an employee's home life perspective.
- Catch employees doing "safety" in a positive vein and letting others know what you have seen by giving praise for safe behaviours.
- Deal with any negligence the first

time, then deal with things gradually becoming worse.

- When someone is not doing things in a safe manner, show them the right way – then write this up and place it in their file after they have signed off on it – something in writing often helps individuals realize the significance the company places on safety.

Every employee has the right to work in a safe environment. According to Work Safe Saskatchewan, under occupational health and safety legislation every employee has three rights:

- The right to know the hazards at work and how to control them;
- The right to find and control workplace hazards; and
- The right to refuse work, which they believe is unusually dangerous.

Safety is an issue on many realms. If an individual is hurt it means other people must step in and take over the work. This can create undo challenges on the rest of the staff. They have their own work to do and now they may have to fill in for someone else. In essence, this may feel like doing double duty and only being paid once. While true, the bigger concern may be the fact the person who is "filling in" may get tired and consequently not be as observant or safety conscious when doing either job. The result may end up being another individual who is hurt on the job.

In addition, you may have an employee who becomes stressed due to the extra pressure. While this is not as easily recognizable or diagnosed, it can create more hardship on your staff and on the individual who is away trying to get better.

Health Canada commissioned a report that found people who are anxious and overworked, for whatever reason, can suffer stress, depression and burnout. Organizations are finding people experience more absenteeism, a greater use of prescription medications, and employee assistance programs (EFAP). The bottom line is that \$2.8 billion dollars a year are lost because of doctor's visits, hospital stays, and emergency room visits.

Even more critical to your organization: people are less creative and innovative. And you know what that means – a direct link to your bottom line and your ability to compete. You certainly want to ensure people are safe physically and emotionally in your workplace so you can continue to do meaningful business.

The cost of taking short cuts and any resulting absenteeism (not to mention

any fines OH&S may place on the firm) is not what you want to see. If you find yourself reprimanding staff for an important security violation, the odds are you have been ignoring many less visible violations in the past. Stop the chain before it gets worse! What are you going to do to improve your safety situation today?

Sherry Knight, is president & CEO of Dimension 11 Ltd., a leader in people and

performance development. Dimension 11 helps companies realize stronger profits so they can create more jobs and better communities.

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Sherry Knight

306-586-2315

sherry@dimension11.com

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