

BUY-LOW FOODS LTD.

Surrey, BC

Warehouse stacks up improved safety record

Back, foot and hand injuries were happening too often at the Surrey grocery and produce warehouses of Buy-Low Foods Ltd. until they joined WCB's Focus Firm Strategy last year.

"We were having too many time-loss injuries in our facilities so we met with WCB and together created a joint business plan to reduce the injuries in our facilities," says Bob Mills, president of Buy-Low.

Buy-Low has seen major reductions in its injury rate since becoming a focus firm. In 2000, there were 31 lost-time injuries whereas in the first six months of 2001, only seven in both facilities. "And out of that, only three involved minor time loss and the others were minor cuts and stuff," boasts Mills. "We've had phenomenal results."

"Buy-Low has cut its claims rate in half," says Ken Bradley, occupational hygiene officer in the Surrey/Langley region.

Mills says the first step as a focus firm was to look at what type of injuries the 100 workers were experiencing most. The joint health and safety committee then went to the workers on shift and showed them safe work procedures, such as proper ways of lifting to avoid lower back injuries.

The company had all its warehouse employees become certified forklift operators to heighten the awareness of proper operation of equipment and the type of injuries that can occur as a result of misuse of equipment. "We also held a training session for all of our first aid attendants to improve the examination and treatment of injured employees," says Mills. "And we increased supervisor audits on the shifts to watch for safety procedures and compliance." Buy-Low also improved the safety component of its orientation program for new employees.

Michael Watton, a warehouseman and member of Buy-Low's joint committee, says all the workers have seen safety improvements. "For example, we have a high-pick section where guys go up on the machines and pick stock down," he describes. "Before they had no safety harnesses, but now they're mandatory. On occasion I've slipped off a pallet and I've been hanging in the air for a couple seconds. Without a harness, I'd have fallen to the ground."

Bradley notes that Buy-Low's management clearly demonstrated a commitment to address the issues of injuries and return to work. "There seems to be a general attitude throughout the organization from the supervisory level as well as workers to continue this commitment to health and safety and to improve their health and safety program," he says.

Mills credits the approach of WCB's Prevention officers for the company's accomplishments. "It wasn't a confrontational situation. We approached this as a joint effort and the officers were there as a resource to help us to lower our claim rate," he says. "I don't think we would have gotten focussed without the time commitment the officers made and the quality of their input to put this joint business plan together and follow up with us."

"Safety is for the benefit of the worker and the company, it's not to hinder us," says Watton. "If it takes a couple extra minutes to do a job the right way, then we'll do it instead of trying to take shortcuts and go fast and possibly injure ourselves. When in doubt, we like to slow down. It's for everybody's benefit. Nobody wants to get hurt."

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