

SERCA Foodservice Inc. Pacific Division

Delta, BC

Safety climate improves for focus firm

Paul Edgett knows that employees at SERCA Foodservice Inc. Pacific Division appreciate the changes he's made since becoming operations health and safety manager last year. He knows because every six months he surveys employees at the Delta food service warehouse operation about safety.

"We take climate surveys to find out how our people feel in terms of our safety programs and where it's going," says Edgett. "We ask about communications, training, recognition, supervision, accountability, responsibility, hazard reporting, hazard correction and our safety climate. And they've told us that our safety program is perceived very well."

A few years ago, SERCA was having an unusually high rate of incidents for their industry including back and musculoskeletal injuries (MSI) among their 800 workers. The WCB brought them into the Focus Firm Strategy to help reduce those rates, and the company brought Edgett on board to focus on health and safety full time.

"The company's record in respect to duration and frequency of claims was 32 per cent above industry average," says Gabriel Giorgio, WCB occupational safety officer in the Richmond/Delta region.

Giorgio is a big fan of all that Edgett has done to turn around SERCA's safety performance.

"SERCA is self-motivated," he says. "The WCB has made some recommendations but they've done the work."

Kyle Meech, who works in inventory control at SERCA, says it used to seem like guys were being hurt all the time, but things are definitely improving. "They're pretty happy now, because the employees had input into how the changes have come about," he says.

For the first quarter of 2001 SERCA had 48% fewer claims and a 45% or 278 fewer days lost than the same quarter in 2000.

Edgett began by examining where the highest rates of injuries were to determine why accidents were happening. "Our biggest challenge was to reduce the amount of strain that our warehouse people go through in a very physically demanding job," he explains. "It's quite a challenge to find creative ways to continuously improve the ergonomic well-being of our staff."

SERCA has reduced pack sizes and provides ergonomic training to staff. They continually coach staff on preferred ways of handling heavy packs. They are also investing in new equipment where needed. "We personalize equipment and make sure it's comfortable and easy to use because then it's more likely to be used," says Edgett. "If something needs to be fixed, it's fixed. Financially, safety is backed."

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