

SUN-RYPE PRODUCTS LTD.

Kelowna, BC

www.sunrype.com

Sun-Rype juices up safety program to reduce injuries

Workers who produced apple-based snacks on the food line at Sun-Rype Products Ltd. in Kelowna were getting a lot of musculoskeletal injuries (MSI), or sprains and strains as well as cuts. Since Sun-Rype has become part of the Workers' Compensation Board's (WCB) Focus Firm Strategy and upgraded their occupational health and safety program, these injuries are being prevented or reduced in severity.

"It's repetitive work, really labour intensive," says Brian Brash, employee co-chair of Sun-Rype's joint committee. "When we first started the food line here, we had very little training for the worker and that led to lots of injuries. But now they rotate on the line every hour, and that's led to less repetitive strain injuries."

Since becoming a focus firm in 1998, Sun-Rype has made major strides in improving health and safety at its workplace. The company hired a full-time occupational health and safety (OHS) coordinator, beefed up the joint committee and instituted a formal OHS program. The Okanagan food and juice producer conducts effective accident investigations and has a strong graduated return-to-work program for injured workers.

Sun-Rype's OHS program now includes regular safety talks for both supervisors and workers. There is a safety bulletin board with useful information and workers are diligent about locking out power sources during equipment maintenance. Increased training and orientation for Sun-Rype's many new employees is an important part of their internal health and safety program.

All the efforts have paid off. Despite doubling the number of employees over the past three years, Sun-Rype's injury rate is down substantially. In the first half of 2001 there were just 14 time loss accidents among the approximately 425 employees whereas in 1998 there were about 52 with only 200 workers.

Glenn Allison, Manager of Employee Relations and Development at Sun-Rype, notes that the company receives a good deal of support from WCB's Prevention officers. "When we need something, they'll come in, say exactly what they think and work with us to find resolution on whatever the issue might be," says Allison.

"We work with these people but they own their own operations," says Gary Kreller, WCB occupational safety officer in Kelowna. "Our job is largely to make sure they succeed on their own, while monitoring and assisting in any way we can. If the firm is working towards compliance, we do more consulting than inspections. We don't write a lot of orders."

A real key to Sun-Rype's success in improving health and safety was the commitment of senior management, which Brash says filtered down to the managers, the supervisors and the workers.

"Five years later people realize that safety is a big part of their jobs," Brash notes. "It's not going away and they're required to follow the procedures that have been laid out."

Allison says it was a team effort throughout the company that led to their success. "People believe that we're putting our money where our mouth is now and we're making efforts to have the workplace be a safe workplace," he says. "There's an awareness and involvement in all types of safety-related activities right throughout the organization."



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