

PORT FISH (P.A.) LTD.

Port Alberni, BC

Fishing for answers

By 1999, Port Fish (P.A.) Ltd., a seafood processor in Port Alberni, knew it was a success. In their first two years of business, the staff had grown to 130 workers. Despite a health and safety conscious staff, the rapid growth contributed to the occurrence of 44 WCB claims in 1998. Plant Management, staff, and the WCB realized that something needed to be done.



Port Fish instituted a strong health and safety program and became part of the WCB Focus Firm Strategy. Implementing the new processes was difficult for Port Fish, because of the unpredictable weather and fishing conditions.

“It was a bit of a struggle at first, because when they would put a plan together, Mother Nature would halt production,” says Peter Davidson, WCB occupational safety officer in the Vancouver Island South region. “There would be no fish, and no workforce so everything would have to stand down until they could reassemble to continue their work, but once we started to see the progress it was very encouraging.”

Davidson says the Prevention Division is taking a cooperative approach with focus firms instead of just enforcing compliance. “It’s a bit of a change from us to them and they received that change in a very welcome way,” he says.

Most of the changes Port Fish made were low-tech, like putting non-slip steps onto ladders and blocking the welders’ shop windows with transparent covering to prevent sparks from hurting the eyes of nearby workers. However, they also revamped their joint health and safety committee to create a more proactive program. They have a monthly safety newsletter to increase awareness of safety issues, and have stepped up training for forklift operators. But perhaps the most significant change, says Glenda Mollet, Human Resources Administrator and Safety Coordinator, was beefing up orientation and training for new and young workers.

“About 70 per cent of our staff are new and young workers,” Mollet says, explaining that the plant is still expanding its operations. “When we first started up, it was a new process, new company and new employees and nobody had any experience with this process. It’s very labour intensive and we had a lot of claims.”

All these efforts have helped bring Port Fish’s record down to just three claims in 2000, a reduction of 91 per cent from 1999 while the workers-hours worked have doubled.

“We let employees know that we need them to work, but not to work to the point where they’re making mistakes,” notes Mollet. “Now people are more aware of safety. They’re paying more attention to their environment and their co-workers’ environment, and if they see somebody doing something that could be improved upon, they take it upon themselves to do something.”

Port Fish also instituted a program to help its employees sit up and take notice of health and safety. And the seemingly insignificant program has ended up producing significant results.

“We knew we needed to do something more, so we implemented what we were calling our ‘Donut Program’,” says Mollet. “Each shift, if they worked two weeks without a WCB claim, were given donuts. It seems like something really insignificant but it worked really well for our company.”

Debora Young, lead hand at Port Fish says the donuts helped bring safety to employees’ attention. “It’s a big thing when you go pick up your paycheck that your shift got the donuts,” she says.

The donut program has now expanded. If the company goes two weeks without an incident, everyone gets donuts on payday, and there is individual recognition for a year without a claim that comes in the form of a safety award, a keepsake such as a pen, mug, or key chain, and a certificate. These are all intended to keep safety in the foreground of the workers’ minds.

“Everyone is working together,” says Young. “Everyone is very safety conscious now. We always remind people safety first, think safety first.”

And why wouldn’t they, with such sweet rewards?

For more information please contact:

Gladys Johnsen, Public Affairs Manager
Prevention Division, WCB
(604) 214-5441 or toll-free in B.C. at 1-888-621-7233, local 5441