



REIDCO METAL INDUSTRIES LTD.

Skills development forges positive safety attitudes

Metal fabrication requires focusing a range of specialized skills on meeting a broad range of needs. At its Kelowna plant, Reidco Metal Industries Ltd. serves trucking, recreational and agricultural customers needing welding, precision sheet-metal forming and other services.

Many of the plant's 100 workers apply skills acquired elsewhere, but Reidco and its labour force also thrive and grow through on-the-job training. This includes up to 40 workers under 25 years of age.

Central to that is a hands-on approach to workplace health and safety that follows the skills hierarchy of plant jobs, according to Operations Manager Wilf Johns.

"After basic safety indoctrination, young workers with no background or experience are assigned to a work centre for entry-level work," says Johns. They are trained in and given tasks using relatively simple equipment. An example is using belt sanders and grinders to deburr material, removing sharp edges left after the fabrication process.

"As they learn to do the work, they also learn to apply safe working procedures," says Johns. Safety instruction in each work area comes from the coordinator or team leader and is reinforced by co-workers in a kind of on-going, group mentoring process.

Reidco maintains that approach as new and young workers rise through a task hierarchy that involves them in more complicated tasks over time.

So the proven entry-level worker can move to another work centre where the work involves math, measuring and blueprint-reading. In a year or so, the average worker may graduate to spot welding, next a semi-automatic punching machine, and then a laser device that burns shapes out of metal.

At every step, safety is taught as, and becomes an integral part of the work process. It's not an after-thought or a side issue, according to Johns.

"Safety first is our mandate," he says. Everyone's a safety officer here; everyone has the authority and the right to stop anything that's unsafe. "We err on the side of caution."

Johns says that Reidco's "open-door policy" means young workers are encouraged to ask questions. "If a person were to the point of feeling scared and unsafe, we'd put them on something they felt more comfortable with"

Johns adds that young workers also need to understand that it's okay to make a mistake and not hide it, "mistakes are learning opportunities."

Learning is what Reidco seems to be about — a bonding of specialized skills to the knowledgeable attitude needed to apply them safely and productively.