

The 2018 award for innovation from The Architectural Woodwork Manufacturing Association of Canada went to BCIT.



BCIT's innovative safety program nets award

By Marnie Douglas

Students in the building and construction trades are getting a good primer in health and safety thanks to a new health and safety program developed by the institute.

Two years ago, Dave Dunn was asked for ideas on how to improve the safety culture in several of the trades programs at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT).

Dunn, who was chief instructor of BCIT's joinery program at the time, hired a retired WorkSafeBC safety officer to look at three programs — joinery, carpentry, and sheet metal — and come up with recommendations. He was shocked at the results.

"I thought we were doing pretty well, and then I received a 50-page report with recommendations," explains Dunn, who is now the associate dean for Building and Construction Trades.

"It wasn't that we weren't doing a good job," says Dunn. "We wanted to take safety to the next level, we wanted the students to recognize what industry standards are when it comes to safety and what they should expect to see in the workplace, not just the classroom. We wanted to make real changes to the culture. To do that, there were some immediate actions and long-term strategies we needed to look at."

Awarded for innovation

Fast-forward to 2018, and the safety improvements have been significant. The new program even earned them the WorkSafeBC Safety Innovation Award at the Architectural Woodwork Manufacturers Association of Canada Awards. The award recognizes original programs, policies, tools, or projects in the woodworking industry that assist in reducing workplace injuries. BCIT was recognized with a plaque at a recent AWMAC gala event.

"The safety program at BCIT is impressive. There's a clear impact for students who can take the knowledge and understanding of safety in the classroom and use those skills in the workplace," says Glenda Harskamp, AWMAC executive director.

Safety program starts with signage and training

Dunn says the improvements started small, with signage posted in the shop relating to four main work procedures.

"It's visible; it's bright; it's large signage that everyone can see. From there, we posted at each machine more safe work procedures [and] detailed information about that particular piece of equipment," says Dunn.

“We’re hopeful the program can be expanded to other manufacturing sectors.”

—Jose Barranco, industry specialist,
WorkSafeBC

BCIT produced signage that includes the dos and don’ts of working in and around each machine and a detailed student-orientation booklet containing all policies and procedures at BCIT, including whom to contact, and step-by-step safe work procedures. Dunn explains that the instructors use the documentation as a guide when they’re training each student on a particular machine. Students then sign off on a safe work procedures checklist.

A bulletin board was created for the main entrance into the shop and includes safety and security procedures; first aid procedures; barricade tape in the event of an incident; occupational health and safety committee contact information and committee-meeting minutes; weekly workplace-inspection notes; and near-miss reports.

Doug Smith, a joinery instructor at BCIT and safety-committee chairperson for the workshop, says the introduction of weekly workplace inspections helps categorize all of the equipment and make it manageable, so the instructor can walk around the area and make sure everything is compliant.

“It could be as simple as sawdust accumulation, or the stairways are obstructed — anything that may pose a hazard. To have it broken down simply to one piece of paper really helps to keep things as safe as possible. It’s a very concise, but precise, way of reporting any problems,” Smith explains.

Students taught safety standards that are transferable to the workforce

Dunn says while the documentation and safety checklists are left primarily up to the instructors, the students are enthusiastic because it’s parallel to industry standards. Everything they learn in the classroom can be considered transferable when they enter the workforce.

“Plus, it’s consistent throughout, and the progress is tracked. Procedures are all documented. The documentation is really key,” he adds.

Jose Barranco, industry specialist with WorkSafeBC, says BCIT was recognized because its program can show sustainable results.

“It’s robust,” notes Barranco. “It’s in place now and can grow; it’s not something that is a ones-off or technology that needs to be implemented.”

In addition, he says, it’s a progressive safety program, meaning students learn a specific set of procedures and must show a level of competency before moving on to the next set.

“It’s sometimes difficult to do such a rigorous program in the workplace but it’s even more challenging in an academic setting. BCIT’s construction and trades program has worked hard to establish this safety program and we’re hopeful it can be expanded to other manufacturing sectors.”

Barranco says the award started four years ago as a means to find innovative solutions to issues in the woodworking industry. He’s seen a number of unique entries in the last four years — using drones to inspect roofs before workers set foot, as an example — but BCIT’s entry was both innovative and sustainable. 🍷



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