

In a small business like this one, sharing your safety concerns with your boss could have a huge impact on your whole team's safety culture.

Small businesses can make large safety strides

By Jesse Marchand

Keeping safe in a small business is no small matter. While small businesses are usually comprised of 20 or less employees, they still face a large number of incidents. In 2015, WorkSafeBC had over 11,000 time-loss claims for injuries from small businesses. The stats also show that the leading causes of injuries at small businesses aren't that different from the ones incurred at large ones, such as falls from heights, overexertion, being struck, or repetitive motion. Many injuries like these can be prevented by being part of a healthy safety culture.

"Incident prevention is just as important for a workplace that has five people as it is for one that has five hundred," says WorkSafeBC manager of Industry and Labour Services Glen McIntosh. "Workplaces are

healthy only when managers, supervisors, and workers all make health and safety a priority."

"The good news is that when you work for a small business, there are lots of ways that you can make a big impact on your company's safety culture," adds McIntosh.

As an employee at a small firm, here are five things you can do to make your workplace safer:

- 1 **Set a good example.** A workplace is a culture and workplace culture is influenced by things like leadership and management, but it's also shaped by peer pressure and worker attitudes. In a small team, your actions can affect the whole group, so taking the time to show you care about your own personal safety can have a huge impact. Show your co-workers that you care about your personal safety and they should too, by always wearing the safety equipment required by your industry. We aren't always careful when we think the work will just take a second, but it only takes a second for an incident to happen.

2 Speak up. If you've developed a safe way of doing something, don't keep it to yourself. Share it with your co-workers and your boss. See something that doesn't seem right? As a worker, it's your responsibility to speak up if you see something unsafe. In a small team, your boss might seem too busy to approach, but think of it this way, it's worth it to speak up if it means saving someone from getting hurt. Still hesitant? You don't have to do it alone. Consult your co-workers, and go forth as a unified team.

3 Know your tools. Good training is the key to using tools correctly. But even with training, you may find you still have questions or concerns about the tools you need to use. If you work in an industry with machines that require regular maintenance, ask yourself: Do I know everything I should about this machine? Am I familiar with its lockout procedures? Do I know how often it needs maintenance? And if I am required to clean it, do I know how to do that safely? If the answer to any of these questions is no, speak up. Sometimes the fear of looking

inexperienced can prevent us from asking questions, but you'll be setting a better example of being safety conscious if you can show that having all the facts before you start is important to you. You never know who else may be questioning the same things.

4 Leave the phone alone. For many young workers, constantly checking their phones has become second nature. But ask yourself, is that text worth your life or someone else's? Your workplace may not have guidelines about phone use in place, but that doesn't mean it should be a free-for-all. We all know that when we're busy looking at our phones, we're not paying attention to our surroundings. If you're using your phone while driving, walking, or working on a busy worksite, you're distracted, which means you could miss something big that you can't undo, unlike that text you just drafted.

5 Refuse unsafe work. Remember that under the *Workers Compensation Act*, you have the right to refuse any work that's unsafe.

For more information on small business safety, visit worksafebc.com/for-employers/small-businesses. ☺



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