



Crew lead Dean Seale working in the hangar at Cascade Aerospace in Abbotsford, B.C.

# Navigating an injury

By Sarah Ripplinger

**Cascade Aerospace's recover-at-work program charts a smooth course ahead when it comes to helping workers who have had a workplace injury.**

Richard Vaughan's passion for vehicles began as a child. Tagging along with his dad at their family auto-wrecker business, he got to know cars inside and out. After graduating from high school, he found his career footing in the aerospace industry, and has now worked for Cascade Aerospace for over 20 years.

Up until early 2020, Vaughan had never missed a day on the job for a workplace injury. Then, a pulled back muscle introduced him to his employer's recover-at-work program.

"My recovery was a lot easier than I thought it was going to be," notes the senior aircraft maintenance engineer.

"It was nice to go to a physio and get treated by a professional right away who could also give my work information on how to limit what I'm doing at work —

instead of taking a bunch of time off going to doctor's appointments and filling out forms."

## Help is close at hand

Based in Abbotsford, B.C., Cascade is a leader in specialty aerospace and defense engineering, manufacturing, and maintenance with a total staff of around 500 workers.

The day Vaughan was injured, he was trying to remove lines and valves inside a nacelle — the housing for an aircraft's engine — which he describes as being "the size of a couple of coffins."

"I was laying in this tube with my arms over my head trying to twist around to reach back behind me when I felt like I pulled something inside my back," recalls Vaughan.

Shrugging off the pain at first, Vaughan soon found himself barely able to walk.

Vaughan went to the first aid room to report his injury and was referred to the company's on-call physiotherapist. The physiotherapist assessed him

and helped define work duties that wouldn't aggravate his injury, such as not lifting heavy objects or going into tight spaces.

Because Vaughan did not need to be bedridden for his injury, he was able to connect with human resources (HR) and get started with Cascade's recover-at-work program right away.

Launched at the company in 2015, the program is designed to give workers the support and tools they need to maintain their work routine while recovering from an injury or when returning to the job after an injury.

"It's often a culture shift that's not always going to change overnight, but it shows employees that their employer wants to support them," says Rachelle Grace, a nurse and member of WorkSafeBC's Strategic Engagements team who was involved in implementing Cascade's recover-at-work program.

## Clearing sightlines

Getting Cascade's program off the ground was fairly straightforward, explains Grace. After signing a partnership agreement with WorkSafeBC, Cascade's executive team members and senior staff received training on how to implement the program.

Helping workers understand how it worked was next, which included sharing key statistics and information that illustrated the importance of the program and how recovery at work can support better recovery outcomes. This was done through discussions and visuals, explains James McCracken, who has worked with Cascade for around 17 years and has been a shop steward with Unifor Local 114 for over 10 years.

Charts, graphics, and handouts about the program were designed to make content more accessible to Cascade's diverse workforce.

"We were able to sell the recover-at-work program to our members because the union was at the table with the executive management team from the very start," says McCracken.

The union collaborated with Cascade's management team to identify the company's challenges and goals, and then incrementally shared key messaging with employees.

"WorkSafeBC showed us that once employees are injured, the longer they are away from work, the harder it is for them to come back," says McCracken. "We

wanted it to be clear that this program isn't about management saying that they don't want workers to be away from work because of an injury."

The union and senior team members communicated that "the goal is to keep employees engaged at their job where they have day-to-day interactions with co-workers and that sense of camaraderie."

## Onboarding with HR

HR plays a central role in Cascade's recover-at-work program. A formal process was established for how and when to follow up with injured workers who require medical attention and time off work, including making follow-up calls and scheduling check-ins.

"There is a lot more engagement now from HR, our safety department, and supervisors, all of whom follow a formal process," says Scott Cadwell, a supervisor with Cascade.

"Supervisors get a report about what are acceptable tasks that injured workers can perform given the limitations of their injury, such as doing desk work or not lifting their arms over their head."

Modified duties are identified during job jar sessions in which supervisors or crew leads identify and categorize tasks by assertion level. HR refers to these job jar jobs — along with the functional abilities form received from an injured worker's physio — to assign work that is relevant to employees' positions and safe for their injury. Functional abilities forms stipulate such things as the maximum weight an injured worker can lift.

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—Richard Vaughan, senior engineer,  
Cascade Aerospace

## Putting results in the bag

Before Cascade started its recover-at-work program, the company's time-loss rates and long-term disability claims were higher than the industry average.

Today, the results of the recover-at-work program can be seen throughout the company. Team morale and continuity are up, and time-loss days due to workplace injuries are down, says Cadwell, who has worked with Cascade for nine years and oversees trade team members.

Cascade's time-loss days due to injury were down to 131 in 2018 compared with 279 the year before. Annual premium assessment costs have also declined by more than 40 percent since 2014.

"The recover-at-work program does save money in terms of lost time and wages, but more importantly it makes workers feel supported," says Grace.

It also staves off such things as mental health issues that can creep up when a worker is off work for an extended period of time, notes Dan Renton, a WorkSafeBC case manager in the Abbotsford Office.

"It shows workers that their employer cares, and also gives them the stability of having a job and the same level of seniority."

## A smooth landing

Part of Cascade's success with their recover-at-work program was their commitment to making it happen, asserts Grace. "They were super invested and engaged, which made all the difference."

Vaughan has since recovered fully from his injuries and is back to his regular duties.

"What I had to do to recover was so easy," says Vaughan. "Overall, I would say that it was a really good program."

For more information about the recover at work program, visit [worksafebc.com](http://worksafebc.com) and search for "How recovery at work helps." 🗣️



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