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Safety is Good Business

Many executives are beginning to acknowledge something that successful business leaders have known for some time: safety is good business. Today's work environment demands cutting edge risk management strategies to help protect your company's liability, your personal liability and your employee's safety. Yet, the only way to ensure a truly successful safety program is to make your management team responsible for actually *preventing* injuries and accidents.

Workplace safety should be addressed no differently than sales, customer service or any other core business objective. Internal analysis within many organizations reveals that divisions, branches and departments that maintain the best safety records also achieve the highest productivity, maintain positive morale and ultimately deliver the greatest profits.

Work-related injuries and accidents are indicative of breakdowns in basic processes and procedures that threaten the efficiency and financial health of an organization and can significantly damage the productivity and efficiency of your operations. Studies have estimated that for every \$1 of direct costs incurred in treating and providing disability benefits to an injured employee, employers incur an additional \$4 in indirect costs. Such costs include management time spent investigating and handling the claim, lost productivity of the injured worker, hiring and retraining a replacement employee, associated property damage and more.

In addition, workplace safety is the law. The Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) specifically outlines employer responsibilities and specific rules for performing almost any task that might subject an employee to the risk of injury. Section 66 (1)(2) of the OHSA notes that failure to comply with these regulations subjects the employer to fines of up to \$500,000 and individual supervisors to personal fines of up to \$25,000 and 12 months in prison.

The cumulative consequences of injuries and accidents are sobering, but once your organization has embraced the need to prioritize workplace safety, it must then focus on two interrelated, yet distinctly different objectives: compliance and accident prevention. A key means of achieving both objectives is your Joint Health and Safety Committee. Required by law, a Joint Health and Safety Committee is made up of individuals who represent the workers and the employer and are committed to improving health and safety conditions in the workplace. You must ensure that the Committee has full management support to be truly effective in its role in identifying potential health and safety problems and bringing these to the employer's attention.

The Committee and your management team will minimize the risks of serious fines and penalties by bringing your organization into initial compliance. To do so, they will implement policies, train all staff levels on their responsibilities, develop written standard operating procedures and inspection lists, provide protective equipment and perform thorough investigations following accidents or injuries to implement corrective actions.

Following these rules and implementing compliance measures cannot, unfortunately, guarantee that employees will actually *perform* their jobs safely.

As a result, despite the best intentions in compliance measures, injuries and accidents may still occur. Because workers' compensation is a no fault system, however, the costs of injuries that result from lack of employee compliance will still be borne by your business. Yet, before managers can take steps to prevent unsafe behavior they need to first understand what causes people to behave unsafely.

Employees perform unsafe acts for many reasons: lack of knowledge about the right procedures, taking short cuts in order to save time, or because they have become complacent and are less careful. To prevent these unsafe behaviours, employers must be proactive with regular and repeated training, develop an environment which provides the right tools, and advocate total commitment from top down in the organization.

Leading organizations are recognizing that safe workplaces not only mean better health and quality of life for their employees, they also mean more profitable businesses and lower costs for employers. By formalizing your organization's commitment to workplace health and safety through effective compliance and prevention strategies while minimizing your claims costs, your organization can realize measurable, consistent returns on investment.

For any further questions, please contact: Paul Hindle, VP of Sales, 416-216-1143 or 1-800-GO-DRAKE.