

Healthy Workplaces

What? Why? How?



Everyone wants to work in a healthy workplace, to have a job where they feel valued, respected, safe and productive. Employers want that too – employees who are satisfied, engaged in their work, committed to their jobs, and productive. So why do we continue to see injuries and illnesses occur on the job, and read statistics about the large percentage of Canadian workers who are dissatisfied, disengaged and stressed out?

WHAT is a Healthy Workplace?

A workplace can only be considered healthy if three key elements are addressed in an integrated manner. These three elements are:

1. The physical work environment must be safe and healthy. This relates to the hazards and issues covered by most health and safety legislation.
2. The psychosocial work environment must be safe and healthy. Other phrases for this could be work organizational factors or workplace stressors that threaten the mental and physical health of employees such as: harassment, bullying, work overload or lack of control over work. There is evidence showing that many of these factors create a two to three times greater risk of injuries, workplace conflict and violence, back pain, and mental illness.
3. Employers should support healthy lifestyles among employees. Work often creates barriers to employees wishing to make healthy lifestyle choices. While employers must not impose healthy lifestyle choices on workers, there are often ways that creative and motivated employers can remove barriers and support the personal health goals of employees.

WHY Should an Employer Care?

There are quite clear moral and legal reasons for caring about employees' health and wellbeing. There are also financial considerations. Every company wants to stay in business and therefore a good reason for employers to create a healthy workplace may be the financial imperative. The same management practices that lead to healthy employees also lead to a healthy bottom line. Three facts put this in perspective:

1. Unhealthy, unsafe and stressful workplaces cost Canadian employers billions of dollars annually in workers' compensation, absenteeism, presenteeism, short- and long-term disability, turnover and lost productivity.
2. Workplace interventions can make significant reductions in these costs.
3. Comprehensive healthy workplace interventions save far more than they are likely to cost and may return between \$1.15 and \$6 for every dollar spent. In fact, some effective interventions are virtually free.*

HOW Can a Workplace Become Healthy?

There are as many routes to a healthy workplace as there are businesses and many resources available to businesses wishing to move in this direction. Health Canada and the National Quality Institute (NQI) have step-by step processes. Health and safety associations like IAPA have resources to assist firms to move along this path.

The key is to be aware of the different elements that must be addressed simultaneously in order to create a healthy workplace. Managers, human resources professionals, health and safety staff, union leaders, training staff, and workers all have a role to play in shaping a workplace culture that encourages both mental and physical health, values employees, and understands their link to a healthy business.

*Source: The Business Case for a Healthy Workplace, IAPA, 2007

Healthy Workplaces: What? Why? How?

For more INFORMATION

Visit our website at www.iapa.ca or contact Customer Care at 905.614.IAPA (4272).

- > Creating Healthy Workplaces (print guide): A much more in-depth publication, with numerous references, available as a free download or in printed format for purchase.
- > Creating Healthy Workplaces: This can be a 3-hour workshop or a 1 hour presentation. It is available on request as on-site training.
- > IAPA's experienced Consultants can work with your company to help you develop a healthy workplace.

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