

Planning to grow? Grow safely!

Your company may be small, but that first big contract could happen any day. You've started planning—what equipment you might need, how many new workers, and many other details—so things will go smoothly when the big day comes.

But have you thought about workplace safety? As new workers are hired and new equipment is installed, it can become increasingly difficult to ensure that everyone knows how to do their job safely, and that new hazards are identified and resolved. Year after year, WorkSafeBC statistics have shown that injury rates are significantly higher—twice as high in 2010—for small food processors with 10 - 19 workers compared to those with up to 9 workers. All of the profit from your first big contract could be eaten up by the costs and lost productivity if a worker, your most important asset, is injured on the job,

There are things you can do to ensure workplace health and safety keeps up with your company's growth. Let's start with the basics of an informal occupational health and safety (OHS) program, required by WorkSafeBC for all small companies with less than 20 workers. You may already have an informal OHS program, but your growing workforce will likely necessitate some modifications. As you grow, you will need to establish and modify the following eight basic components that will help prevent accidents and injuries from happening, as well as help deal with any incidents that do occur:

1. A process for identifying, assessing and controlling hazards that often increase with new equipment, and increased production. How will workers, existing and new, know how to report an unsafe situation if they see one?
2. Written safe work procedures for specific tasks that could result in injury, especially if you have new, unfamiliar equipment. New equipment will require careful inspection to determine policies for safe operation, guarding and lockout. You may want to consider policies or procedures that were unnecessary when your company was smaller, such as a violence prevention policy, a mobile phone policy, or what to do when working alone. You may also need to modify your emergency response procedures for incidents such as a fire or gas leak, for example, if the layout of your workplace has changed to accommodate more equipment.
3. Orientation, education, training, and supervision in how to carry out tasks safely at your workplace. Your orientation may need to be modified to incorporate new equipment and procedures, and existing workers may need additional training. With more workers comes the need for more supervisors, so make sure your supervisors know their OHS responsibilities.
4. Routine inspections of your worksite, equipment, and work procedures to help identify hazards. Often, when a company expands rapidly, the worksite may become crowded, and housekeeping to keep all areas clear of slip, trip and fall hazards should be a consideration.
5. Incident investigations to identify causes and prevent recurrence. Your existing procedure may need to be updated to include a supervisor or worker in the process.
6. Regular health and safety meetings that include workers, to provide an opportunity to communicate with workers and supervisors, and raise any concerns about health and safety.
7. Up-to-date records and statistics, such as documentation of training activities, first aid treatments, safety discussions, safety inspections, and incident investigations.

8. First aid: Check whether the level of first aid required for your workplace changes with the number of workers you plan to have, and make sure everyone knows how to deal with injuries on the job.

If you are looking ahead to the day when you have 20 or more workers, you will need a formal health and safety program. The value of a formal program is that it establishes a solid foundation of workplace health and safety for all future growth and saves you money in the long run. The good news is, injury rates are lower for larger food processing companies with formal health and safety programs in place.

Planning for workplace safety doesn't have to be costly. Take advantage of the SSFPA and FIOSA/MIOSA resources your WorkSafeBC premiums have allowed us to develop. In addition, WorkSafeBC has free publications that can be viewed or downloaded, and handouts and videos that can be used at training sessions. Here are some suggestions:

WorkSafe BC

- Health and Safety for Small and Medium Sized Food Processors
http://www.worksafebc.com/publications/high_resolution_publications/assets/pdf/BK128.pdf
- Small Business Health & Safety Log Book
http://www.worksafebc.com/publications/health_and_safety/by_topic/assets/pdf/small_biz_log_book.pdf
- Food and Beverage Processing Equipment
http://www2.worksafebc.com/i/posters/2011/MS_11_01.html
- Tool Box Meeting Guides
<http://www2.worksafebc.com/Portals/Manufacturing/ToolboxMeetingGuides-Index.asp>

If you have questions about your OHS program, contact your industry associations at:

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