

On Occupational Health and Safety

Cleaning up the workplace

Health & safety committees tackle toxins in cleaners

Every day in Canada, janitorial and cleaning staff across the country use billions of litres of cleaning products. Many of these products contain toxic ingredients that are a hazard to the health of workers using them and also to the environment. Some even contain carcinogens that can cause cancer.

A few years back, shore plant workers in British Columbia's fishing industry were getting rashes and coughs from the cleaning products they used. From this experience, health and safety activists in B.C. decided to focus their efforts on toxins in cleaning products used in a wide variety of workplaces, said Sean Griffin, research coordinator for the Labour Environmental Alliance Society (LEAS) of B.C. LEAS launched the "Cleaners and Toxins Project" to train health and safety committee members in the province about the health and environmental effects of the cleaners they were using and to help them replace toxic cleaners with safer, environmentally-preferable products. Currently, the Cleaners and Toxins project is focusing on the hotel industry and schools, two of the heaviest users of cleaning products in Canada.

The Cleaners and Toxins project has been a wake up call to health and safety committees who did not realize the health and environmental

consequences of the products they were using. Griffin says the new knowledge health and safety committees gain through the project has energized them and allowed them to take a proactive role on toxins in their workplace.

Hotel Removes Toxins

Marvin Solomon, a health and safety committee member at The Fairmont Hotel Vancouver, took part in a one day training program on cleaners and toxins presented by LEAS as part of the current project, funded in part by WorkSafeBC. After reviewing the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for all of the hotel's cleaning products, LEAS identified only five products with health concerns. Solomon says they did not use two of these products very much because they were not very effective, so it was easy to stop using them. The hotel has asked their supplier to find less toxic alternatives for the other three products. Solomon warns that suppliers may be reluctant to come up with alternatives. But if suppliers understand that companies are willing to go elsewhere to purchase less toxic cleaners, they will often become cooperative to keep your business.

Solomon says the most important success of the project for The Fairmont Hotel Vancouver has been to help health and safety committee members learn to completely read and understand Material Safety Data Sheets. It is important that committee members know where to get more information when the MSDS is out of date or missing crucial information.



Photo: LEAS

In this issue . . .

Cleaning Up the Workplace
Workplace Stress Initiative
Charts Future
Upcoming Events
Check Out This Website
Fact Sheet — Health
and Safety for Pregnant
Workers

Continued on page 3

Workplace Stress Initiative Charts Future

A group of like-minded organizations came together in January 2007 to forge the future direction for dealing with workplace stress in Manitoba. The Workplace Stress Initiative brings together organizations who are concerned about the impact of workplace stress on the health of working Manitobans and our communities.

Participants in the strategic planning session included representatives from the Family Centre of Winnipeg, United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and the Community Unemployed Help Centre, among many others. With coordination provided by the Occupational Health Centre, the Workplace Stress Initiative developed a strategic plan to guide its work for the next three years. The following plan is the result of this work.

Mission

The Workplace Stress Initiative is a collaborative partnership that promotes healthy workplace practices to reduce workplace stress in Manitoba.

Vision

The Workplace Stress Initiative is a leader in effecting changes in workplace stress prevention policies, practices and legislation that promote healthy workplaces.

Key Focus Areas and Overall Goals

(to January 2010)

Organizational Development

To have a stable, diverse base of financial and human resources.

Awareness/Education

To have a high level of awareness of the issue of workplace stress and awareness of how to implement healthy workplace strategies.

Advocacy

To advocate for changes in workplace stress prevention policies, practices and legislation.

Marketing

To increase awareness of the Workplace Stress Initiative and participation in the activities of the Workplace Stress Initiative.

If your organization would like to participate in this exciting time for the Workplace Stress Initiative, contact Maureen Grace at 926-7902 or email mgrace@mflohc.mb.ca

Upcoming Events

QNET presents

Conflict Resolution: Learn to Manage Conflict Effectively — May 29, 2007

Cost: 359 + GST (members);

\$399 + GST (non-members)

For more information call: 949-4999 or go to www.qnet.mb.ca

Occupational Health Centre presents

An Overview of Federal Government Initiatives for the Reduction of Toxic Substances

June 5, 2007 - 9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

Union Centre, Room 103-275 Broadway

No Cost

For more information call 926-7907

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety (CCOHS) presents

CCOHS Forum 2007: Emerging Health and Safety Issues from Changing Workplaces

September 17 & 18, 2007 Vancouver, B.C.

Cost: \$400 (early bird); \$500 (after June 30)

For more information call (905) 572-2981 or go to www.ccohs.ca

Health, Work & Wellness Conference 2007

October 17-20, 2007 — Toronto, Ontario

Cost: \$749 (early bird until July 13)

For more information call 1-877-805-0922 or go to www.healthworkandwellness.com

WARNING!

Examples of ingredients LEAS recommends you DO NOT use in your workplace

Dibutyl phtalate — a severe skin irritant and may cause damage to the developing fetus. An “endocrine-disruptor” that can affect the hormone-producing organs of the body. Used in some floor waxes.

Ethoxylated nonyl phenol — an endocrine-disruptor used in laundry detergents & all-purpose cleaners and strippers.

Methylene chloride — a carcinogen (causes cancer) and a reproductive toxin. May cause liver and brain damage on inhalation. Used in paint strippers, stain & graffiti removers

Go to the LEAS website www.leas.ca to see a full list of ingredients you should not use or should substitute with less toxic alternatives

Through the Cleaners & Toxins project, health and safety committees collect Material Safety Data Sheets for all of the cleaning products in the workplace. LEAS does an independent review of the products and makes recommendations back to the workplace health and safety committee on their use of cleaners.

School Pilot Project

New Westminister School District in B.C. also participates in the Cleaners and Toxins Project. They are currently piloting the use of alternative, less toxic products in one of their schools, Lord Tweedsmuir Elementary School. Glen Henderson, Operations Manager for the District, says it is important to try out the less toxic products in a busy school such as Lord Tweedsmuir which has a main school building and a portable unit with a total of 1000 students. They want to see how the products work for an entire year and through all four seasons. Winter and spring bring more salt and mud into the buildings while summer

brings sand and grass, which all need to be cleaned up. They are still in the process of evaluating the products.

The custodian at Lord Tweedsmuir Elementary School, Ralph Loxtercamp, says he has been very happy with the new products so far. Loxtercamp reports though that some of the new products do not have clear mixing instructions. This will have to be resolved if the product is accepted for use by the whole school district. Loxtercamp also cautions that both workers and the public have been conditioned to want citrus-smelling products with bright colours to believe that a product is cleaning effectively. It may be difficult for some to accept odourless and colourless alternative cleaning products.

Henderson says that in the end, the workers using the less toxic products are the ones who will have to be satisfied with them. But, he adds that it is crucial to provide awareness training and involve the health and safety committee, workers and union in the project to ensure that everyone will support the change to less toxic products.

You can download your free copy of LEAS’s Cleaners and Toxins Guide at www.leas.ca

did you know . . . ?

Nearly three million Canadians will experience depression at one point in their life.

It most often affects people in their working years, between the ages of 24 and 44.

source: Canadian Mental Health Association

May 7-13, 2007 is
National Mental Health Week
Work/Balance: It’s a Matter of Time
go to: www.cmha.org

I want to help!

I will support the Occupational Health Centre to help Manitobans protect their health and safety at work.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Prov _____

Postal Code _____

Please make your cheque payable to the
MFL Occupational Health Centre
102-275 Broadway
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 4M6



Check out this website!

Mental Health at Work

<http://www.cgsst.com/sante/eng/default.asp>

This excellent website is from the Universite Laval's Chair in Occupational Health and Safety Management with several partner organizations. It contains regularly updated information on stress at the individual and organizational level. The site provides tools to measure the consequences of stress, and provides information on prevention.

Let us know about your favourite health and safety related website! Email your suggestions to khamilton@mflohc.mb.ca

Do you have an article, information or story about workplace health and safety that you want to share?

We reserve the right to edit. Send your newsletter contributions for "Focus on Occupational Health and Safety" to Karen Hamilton at khamilton@mflohc.mb.ca or fax: 956-0848

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The MFL Occupational Health Centre (OHC) is a community health centre focussed on promoting the health of Manitoba workers. We are a non-profit, charitable organization funded by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and by donations from individuals and unions. We are committed to working with all Manitobans who are interested in creating safer and healthier workplaces.

The OHC provides the following services to Manitobans:

- medical services to help you find out if your job is making you sick
- education and assistance to workplace health and safety committees to identify and resolve health and safety problems.
- special initiatives with immigrant and Aboriginal communities
- information and library services, Monday to Friday from 9 am to 5 pm