

## A Proactive Approach (02/04)<sup>i</sup>

By KELLY LOUISEIZE

A sign posted at the entranceway to the De Beers Canada office in Sudbury warns people to thoroughly wipe their boots off before entering the building, since a wet floor could cause potential accidents. In the foyer one notices the emergency kit mounted on the wall along with strategically placed safety posters. The secretary phones to let the branch manager know a visitor has arrived, and while waiting takes the time to inform the guest of emergency protocol, where the emergency switch is, and if one hears the alarm to go immediately to the nearest exit.



Rhonda Thomson, a worker with De Beers Canada in Sudbury, hails the company's decision to implement new workplace changes that reduce the risk of injury, such as the situating Ro-Tap machines on a table, rather than the floor, to prevent continuous bending.

It is no wonder De Beers Canada received an Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers Inc. Certificate of Achievement Award last November for the prevention of occupational diseases and injury.

In fact, it was De Beers who first called the organization with potential air quality problems at their Sudbury plant, Dwayne Thomson, Sudbury's treatment plant supervisor for De Beers says. Inspectors and staff from the health clinic came in with devices to monitor the air and concluded there were no health concerns over air quality.

However, the assessment did not stop there. In their pursuit to create an optimum health and safety workplace, Thomson asked the ergonomist, Trevor Schell, to give some suggestions for their processing and office facility.

"They obviously saw that we were very proactive because even before he got his report written, we were bothering him for certain measurements because we wanted to implement one of his ideas immediately," says Thomson.

The idea was to install a three and-a-half foot high table for the Ro-Tap machines. Originally these sieve-like machines were put on the floor, and by sitting them on a table, it prevents any injuries that may stem from bending down repeatedly.

In addition, more rubber mats were placed on the concrete floor around the working tables.

Thomson says Schell also suggested purchasing tables so the sample bags, weighing approximately 15 kilograms each, could easily be transferred from one section of the weigh station to another with minimal lifting. Prior to adding the tables, the process was at times physically challenging for some of the employees. Chairs were also put in place along the weigh station.

Don Boucher, exploration manager for De Beers, says they are trying to mitigate any potential hazards within the office area. Schell went through the office to find some of the desks were too low, and floorboards or mats were suggested to ease back pain. The company heeded Shell's advice.

However, Thomson advises that there is a fine line between making a safer workplace and creating more dangers.

“When you put something in to fix something, you obviously put another hazard that someone could get caught in.”

For example, a conveyer belt was suggested to move the mixed samples to the screening area to avoid any repetitive and heavy lifting. However, a conveyer belt posed another problem in such that if people were too close, they could get entangled. Instead, part of the solution was to move some of the screeners down from an elevated area to reduce the chance of people hurting themselves while walking up and down the stairs.

After Schell gave the official report and recommendations to De Beers, it took approximately two months to complete the recommendations at a cost of about \$5,000.

“It cost so much money when someone gets hurt, you might as well spend it on the education side,” Thomson explains.

Employees noticed the company reacting to some of their suggestions. One person on staff noticed he did not have traction on the concrete floor even though he was wearing industrial boots. He suggested scarring the floor with indentations and since then no injuries have occurred.

“The employees are responding very positively,” Thomson says. “When they see you doing these types of improvements and it is for their own benefit, they buy into the safety issue.”

That is why the company was chosen for the award in 2003, Donna Campbell, executive director of OHCOW says. Through the year the company was continually proactive in addressing health and safety workplace concerns.

She says these kinds of injuries that were prevented at De Beers are very common. Trends indicate in the last 10 years that muscle and skeletal injuries are the prime targets in the workplace.

“That would be all the repetitive strain, and really the ergonomic issues,” Campbell says.

“That was on the top of the list; it was in 1993, and it is now.”

The majority of the companies that do take advantage of the free service are small businesses with approximately eight to 10 employees.

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<sup>i</sup> Louiseize, Kelly. [A Proactive Approach \(02/09\)](http://www.nob.on.ca/regional/Sudbury/headlines.asp?437id145-pn=&view=26735). Northern Ontario Business. [Online: Accessed September 19, 2005] <http://www.nob.on.ca/regional/Sudbury/headlines.asp?437id145-pn=&view=26735>.