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Safety training attempts to end 'carnage' at work

By Sue Bailey/Star Staff Reporter

The statistics are grim. Every 10 minutes, 27 workers in Ontario are injured on the job. Every working day, someone in this province dies at work.

These statistics were compiled by the Workplace Health and Safety Agency, an organization of business and union leaders which reports to the Ontario Ministry of Labor. Agency representatives were in Windsor Wednesday to present a landmark workplace safety training program.

"We're singularly devoting our energies to preventing accidents and deaths in Ontario," said Paul Forder, the Agency's vice-chairman of labor. "We're here because the carnage is unbearable in human and economic terms.

Forder and Robert McMurdo, the agency's vice-chairman for management, unveiled the

Core Certification Training Program during a news conference at the Occupational Health Clinic for Ontario Workers on Victoria Avenue.

Ontario companies employing 20 workers or more have until April 6, 1995 to certify at least two employees. Otherwise, they will violate the Occupational Health and Safety Act and could be heavily fined by the Workers' Compensation Board, McMurdo said.

UNDER THE ACT, most Ontario workplaces with 20 or more employees must have a joint health and safety committee with members from labor and management. Bill 208 was passed in the Ontario legislature in August 1990, requiring these committees to also have certified members.

"Labor and management both share the goal of reducing accidents and illness in the workplace," McMurdo said. "The certification program is a major step toward achieving that goal."

Training lasts from one to three weeks, depending on the services a company provides, and the number of workers employed. Up to 100,000 Ontario workers at 50,000 workplaces will participate in the program, Forder said.

"Injuries are predictable and preventable," he said. "They won't happen if people learn how to recognize and correct hazards where they work."

Trainers accredited by the agency will teach participants how to do safety inspections, accident investigations, and the basics of health and safety law.

But a safer, more enlightened workforce requires cash and, according to the act, employers must foot the bill. One week of certification training costs \$535, two weeks \$765 and three weeks carries a price tag of \$995.

Employers must also pay workers' salaries while they're off work completing the program.

Dave Mazzocca, president of E.W. Metal Works Ltd. in Windsor, plans to avoid certification training — even if he has to pay his current staff overtime.

"RIGHT NOW I have a workforce of just under 20 people, and I'll make a deliberate effort to keep it that way," he said. "We've tried to comply as well as we can with the safety regulations but I don't see any need for certification."

Mazzocca, whose company already has a health and safety committee, said the program is "just another money-grab" engineered by Workers' Compensation.

He said a safety committee helped his firm achieve a lower-than-average accident rate, according to industry statistics monitored quarterly.

The certification rule is a "big hassle" for small businesses that will be expensive and dis-

ruptive when workers take time off for safety training, he said.

Jim McGowan, plant manager of General Chemical Canada Ltd. in Amherstburg, disagrees. General Chemical employs 300 and is currently hosting Ontario's first certification training program for 23 workers from its own staff and seven other local firms.

"This is a program specifically aimed at safety and health," he said. "Any enlightened employer supports the idea and has for many years."

Supporters say the program will cut Workers' Compensation Board costs — they currently top \$3 billion in direct compensation payments annually — and that a safe, healthy workforce will save employers money in the long run.