



Road builders pave way for incentive program

By Jeffrey Rotin

The BC Road Construction & Maintenance Safety Network is taking the lead in B.C. with a certificate of recognition (COR) program. The program awards rebates to companies that complete a series of steps to take them beyond regulatory compliance. The Safety Network is working in partnership with the WCB on the pilot project that began in January 2003. The pilot may serve as a model for other industries.

The COR focuses on changing the corporate safety culture. Rather than training individual workers, the program gives management the leadership tools to make positive changes to the health and safety culture of their company.

COR certification is already standard practice in the construction industry in other provinces. According to Stephen Torrence, executive director of the Safety Network, B.C. road builders are hoping to

duplicate the 25 percent reduction in claims and 40 percent decrease in the duration rate of claims that the Alberta construction sector achieved as a result of the COR.

The certification will also make B.C. road-building firms more competitive by enabling them to bid on national projects that use COR certification as a pre-qualification requirement.

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How the program works

There are several steps to the COR program. First, owners, managers, and supervisors take a series of courses, ranging in duration from a half day to two days. Depending on the size of the company, these include the principles of health and safety management, leadership in health and safety, auditor training, training the safety trainer, owners' responsibilities for health and safety, and reintegrating the injured worker effectively and efficiently.

Upon completion of the training, companies then conduct an internal assessment using a standardized format. In some cases they may also have to pass an external review of their health and safety program. Finally, the Safety Network does a review to ensure that companies have completed all COR safety standards.

The main goal of the COR program is to improve health and safety performance. That in turn should reduce the incidence of injuries, especially among young workers who need special attention. Better safety performance can also improve the bottom line for owners: companies that achieve certification will be entitled to a 5 percent rebate on their WCB assessments.

The COR program can be modified to meet the needs of smaller companies with less than 20 employees. “It will be useful to small and mid-sized employers that aren't currently involved in the health and safety arena,” says Don Nelson, WCB Industry Services manager for construction and road building. To participate in the COR program, companies will be required to implement a safety program, regardless of their size.

How other industries can participate

The pilot will be evaluated in April 2003. If the results are positive, other industries will have the opportunity to submit proposals to the WCB for a COR program.

“This is industry driven. Our role is to serve their needs in this area,” Nelson stresses. “The WCB's role is fundamentally supportive in nature.”

Proposals must be submitted by a recognized industry association. To prepare for the proposal, Nelson recommends that associations gather as much information as they can by consulting members, conducting a needs assessment, and researching counterparts in other provinces that have completed the COR program.

Successful applicants will need to demonstrate that they have broad-based support within their industry for the program. They will need to provide a budget and a business plan that outlines how they will administer the program and how they will implement the training requirements.

Industries will also have to agree to an increased assessment in order to provide the rebates to companies that achieve COR certification.

The long-term benefits

In the long term, reduced claim costs can bring down the base assessment rate for all employers in that sector. The more industries that participate, the greater the advantage to B.C. overall, says Nelson. “A reduced assessment rate is a competitive advantage not only to employers, but to our province as a whole in the international arena.”

Nelson sees other benefits of the COR program, including an increased awareness among employers of the true cost of accidents and the value of having return-to-work programs.

In April, if your association requires more information on how your industry can submit a proposal for COR, visit the WCB Health and Safety Centre web site at www.healthandsafetycentre.org or call the Prevention Information Line at 604 276-3100, toll-free in B.C. at 1 888 621-7233, and ask to speak to the Industry Services manager for your industry. In addition, more information can be found on the Safety Network's web site at www.safetynetwork.bc.ca.

