

## Backgrounder

### Small Business - A Driving Force in BC

Small businesses in British Columbia continue to open at a faster rate than in any other province. During the last decade, small business in BC grew an average of 3.1% annually. More than 92% of these businesses have fewer than 20 workers and 84% are micro-businesses employing fewer than five full time workers. Small businesses create more private-sector jobs than large companies and contribute more to BC's economy than small businesses in any other province\*. Almost three-quarters of small businesses in BC operate in the service sector.

Small businesses make up over 92 percent of WorkSafeBC's registered employers.

Some positive trends in the period 2000 – 2004 have been: a 12% increase in overall payroll; a 3% decline in claims costs and a drop in the overall injury rate from 3.2 in 2000 to 2.6 in 2004. However, small businesses had an average of 513 serious injuries and 53 fatalities in each of the last five years. The cost of workplace injuries, including hidden costs such as missed deadlines, loss of production and competitiveness, negative publicity, and higher insurance premiums can devastate a small business.

### Making Small Business a Priority

Since its inception in August 2000, the Small Business Service Centre has consulted with the business community to develop materials and programs to help small businesses better understand and comply with the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation* and encourage a reduction of workplace incidents and injuries and establish early return to work programs.

The StartSafe program was launched in 2003 to provide industry specific occupational health and safety (OH&S) information tailored to the concerns of companies newly registered with WorkSafeBC.

In 2004, the Small Business Service Centre partnered with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) to produce the *Small Business Primer - A Guide to the WCB*, a comprehensive guide to the major WorkSafeBC issues of concern to small businesses. The Small Business Call Centre was established to enable small construction employers to obtain WorkSafeBC information quickly, easily and efficiently.

And in 2005 the Small Business Service Centre partnered with Okanagan University College to develop an on-line OH&S course for students enrolled in business administration and human resource management programs. In a separate initiative the Service Centre partnered with industry experts to develop materials promoting accident prevention in confined work spaces in the shipbuilding, municipal, manufacturing and construction sectors.

## **Focus on Violence in the Workplace**

Violence is a growing problem in our communities and workplaces. An act of violence in the workplace can have devastating consequences for employees and the business. The service industry, the retail sector in particular, is significantly affected by workplace violence.

From 2000 to 2004, there were 543 disability claims accepted by WorkSafeBC in the retail sector because of acts of violence and force. These claims resulted in close to 30,000 days lost, and over \$4.2 million of claims cost paid in this period. A detailed analysis of claims shows that acts of violence or force were the eighth highest ranking cause of work-related injury in the retail industry in terms of claim costs paid, with the average per claim cost of \$7,856 being the fourth highest of all injury types.

The frequency of workplace violence is on the rise in many businesses in BC and will continue to be a focus area for the Small Business Service Centre.

In the coming months, after consultation with external stakeholders and business associations, the Small Business Service Centre will focus on new initiatives for the plastics industry, ski hills and gondola workers, security and patrol services, the wine industry, hospitality and tourism, landscaping, pest control and steep slope roofing in the construction industry.

The Small Business Service Centre's ongoing work for small business, and its established programs, can be accessed online at [smallbusiness.healthandsafetycentre.org](http://smallbusiness.healthandsafetycentre.org).

Employer feedback, suggestions and participation are always welcome. Phone 604-214-6912 in the Lower Mainland, or toll-free elsewhere 1- 888-621-7233 or email [smallbiz@wcb.bc.ca](mailto:smallbiz@wcb.bc.ca).

Source Data:  
WCB Data Warehouse  
\*BC Stats