

PROFILE

Abacado Building Supplies Ltd.

Richmond, BC

Granite company builds rock-solid workplace

Polly Li has helped carve out a safer workplace for her employees at Abacado Building Supplies Ltd. by making some relatively simple changes. Li and her husband knew health and safety was important when they started their custom granite and stone business nine years ago, but they weren't aware of all the health and safety requirements. Li says, "We used common sense about safety, but by working with the WCB we were able to identify more areas where we could make improvements."

Abacado's 14 employees manufacture and install granite, marble, and stone for kitchen countertops, bathroom vanity tops, and fireplace decorations. They also supply stonework for commercial buildings, external walls, lobbies, and flooring. The company's 3,000-square-foot Richmond workshop is a busy place. Workers move stone in and out and shape it using cutting saws, polishing machines, and drills.



Li already knew that the loud machines operating in the workshop were a concern and provided her employees with hearing protection. In addition, she now arranges for regular hearing tests for her employees. "My workers are happy to know the hearing standards and to know that we are concerned about their hearing," she says.

The job also requires workers to move huge slabs of granite or marble around the shop. Li has always trained her employees to do this safely. "They need to know how to lift the material because the stone is heavy, perhaps 700 pounds per slab," she says. "We use a forklift with an extension, and always have at least three people to lift anything up — one to drive the forklift and the other two to hold the material and help raise, lower, or move it."

Li purchased a new extension set from a safety supply company to meet WCB requirements and help ensure the safety of workers using the equipment. Forklift upgrades also included signs on the equipment clearly indicating weight and maximum capacity.

After Li learned more about electrical and wiring system requirements, Abacado also made upgrades that included higher levels of protection for the sockets and higher-grade equipment.

The safety improvements that Li made at Abacado are all relatively minor, but even minor changes can have a major impact when it comes to workplace health and safety. She views such changes as an investment in company morale as much as a safety investment. "The safety measures provide our workers with more confidence, knowing that they can safely work with our heavy materials," she says. "The employees feel that the company cares about them, so they have more loyalty to the company."

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