

## PROFILE

### Castart Studios

Victoria, BC

[www.castartstudios.com](http://www.castartstudios.com)

### *Developing safety strategies from scratch*

If your company is one of hundreds in the same industry, there's usually some information available about safety programs and strategies. But when your company is unique, you have to start from scratch.

That's the situation in which Castart Studios of Victoria found itself. Castart manufactures statues, benches and art pieces for the home and garden. Using original designs created by local artists, they make moulds and produce statues to sell wholesale to home decor and garden stores and gift centres around North America. There are no formal training programs on how to make statues, so Castart has had to develop its own safety training program for themselves and their employees.



“Developing a knowledgeable and skilled employee is a big investment. In return, you'd like them to stay on the job for a long time,” says David Talbot, Castart's owner. One of the fundamental values you can offer is a safe working environment. Safety can actually enhance your business.”

Castart has about 15 employees, although the actual number fluctuates with the seasons. The company has grown steadily since Talbot bought the firm in 1995, and recently moved to larger facilities — a 7,000 square-foot factory on an acre of property. A major reason for the move was finding a large-enough facility so that they could mechanize some of their procedures. “A lot of our work involves heavy lifting, and our previous location wasn't conducive to that,” says Talbot. “Here we can use a forklift to lift some things, and rollers for moving others. It's a lot more ergonomic.”

When creating their handmade pieces, they start with a design, then sculpt the piece out of clay, plasticine or wood. Next they make a mould from that piece using rubber and fibreglass, pour plaster or concrete into the mould, and finish it by colouring and staining.

At every stage of the process, there are health and safety issues. The rubber application is done in a ventilated area using gloves, eye protection, and a respirator. Fibreglass work is generally done outside for ventilation. Pouring plaster or concrete requires gloves, ventilation, eye protection, and earplugs. Finally, for staining, they use a ventilation room and use proper protective gear. “We make it very clear to our staff that we won't accept any shortcuts with regard to safety,” says Talbot. “All new employees are thoroughly trained.”

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Their biggest safety issue, however, is lifting. Although Castart is constantly looking for ways of eliminating lifting from their procedures, many of Castart's specialized techniques cannot be automated. For example, removing air bubbles results in a better end product, but requires that pouring and vibrating the moulds be done by hand. "We emphasize training and supervision to enforce our strict policies about what employees can lift on their own and when to get help. There is a tendency for some employees to lift when they shouldn't because it seems quicker or more macho — that's why constant supervision is important."

"It's an ongoing challenge to develop a safety program for a company like Castart," says Talbot. "But in the long run, it's worth it. Making sure that safety rules are followed actually encourages our employees to be more loyal to the company. Following health and safety guidelines is just good business practice."

For more information please contact the Small Business Service Centre at:

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