

PROFILE

C & S Kitchens & Millwork Ltd.

Victoria, BC

Growing cabinet maker writes the book on health and safety

Stephen Pal's business is doing so well he's had to write a book. His Victoria-based C&S Kitchens & Millwork has been creating custom kitchen cabinets and millwork — including reception desks, offices, and dental facilities — since 1992. By last year he had 4 employees. Then business tripled in 8 months and he suddenly needed 11 employees in his 4,600 square-foot shop. That's when he realized he needed the book, an employee training manual.

“When there were just a few of us, it was just one person training another person,” says Stephen. “But now that we're bigger we've had to formalize the process.” Stephen is drafting a guide that will explain all the shop's procedures and rules. It will form an important part of the training for new employees and employees moving to new machines in the shop. The guide will describe the company's health and safety program and explain key components such as lockout procedures, which will improve health and safety and make the business more efficient.

With its rapid growth, C&S has added machines such as table saws, edge banding equipment, and boring machines. Stephen wanted to ensure that every worker was trained on each machine and that training was consistent. The guide will also describe the necessary maintenance procedures for each machine, which has had an unexpected side effect. Stephen says, “The workers are taking more responsibility for the machines they are working on. It's helped improve their level of involvement in what they're doing.”

Aside from Stephen becoming an author out of necessity, the rapid growth of the business has resulted in other changes. C&S now has a shop foreman as well as a safety advisor who workers can go to with health and safety issues. Stephen is also implementing emergency plans for earthquakes and fires, and ensuring that his employees are trained in first aid.

In addition to procedural upgrades, C&S has updated safety equipment, WHMIS materials and safety features on saws and in the spray booth. Safety equipment upgrades cost the company more than \$10,000, a lot for a shop that size, but Stephen says the hardest part has been the amount of time they've had to spend creating the training manual.

“It's a lot of outlay, but once it's set up, it makes life so much easier,” he says. “Some of the things we've learned going through this process will save us a lot of time and energy down the road.” Investments in training procedures and equipment don't just save time and money; they prevent accidents and injuries, which is good business no matter what size the company.

When Stephen started out he had no idea that a small business needed to give such careful thought to health and safety issues. “We thought this kind of thing was for someone with 100 employees,” he says. “I guess smaller companies need to be aware of these sorts of issues, too.”

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

E-mail: smallbiz@wcb.bc.ca

Phone: 604 214-6912 in the Lower Mainland
or 1 888 621-7233 local 6912, toll-free in BC