

PROFILE

Donn Dean Collision Ltd.

Burnaby, BC

Hazard-reduction keeps autobody workers happy

Toxic chemicals, dust, jagged metal and broken glass, loud noise — these are the potential hazards that autobody workers face on a daily basis to bring damaged cars back to life. Despite the hazards, the paint technicians at Donn Dean Collision Ltd. aren't afraid to go to work. That's because the 54-year-old Burnaby company isn't afraid to do what it takes to ensure a healthy, safe workplace.

According to operations manager Andrew Stewart, that means providing a clean, well-lit facility, up-to-date equipment, worker training, and safety gear. No small task for a shop that employs 13 workers in an 8,400-square-foot facility, where workers repair and paint vehicles that have damage related to accidents, vandalism, or theft.



But then, Donn Dean is considered one of the pioneers in its industry. “We’ve always strived to be on top of technology,” says Stewart. In 1989, the company bought two downdraft infrared painting booths, which provide cleaner airflow and a safer workspace for paint technicians. The company also installed dust-extraction systems to help minimize the dust generated by bodywork.

Donn Dean also emphasizes worker education and training. “When we hire a new employee, we give them a handbook that lays out safety rules and other company information,” says Stewart. “Then they’re mentored directly by a journeyman. We want to ensure they understand the issues involved in their jobs so they’re not putting themselves in danger.”

The company also supplies safety equipment to its employees at no charge, providing masks and respirators to protect against the toxic chemicals found in many paints and solvents as well as earplugs to protect against loud shop noise. The shop even has a policy about frayed electrical cords. “All cords are regularly inspected,” says Stewart. “If a problem cord is found, we ask the workers to cut the end off so it can’t be used and bring it into the office so we know to order a new one.”

Other prevention efforts also include monthly safety meetings, walk-through inspections, and working with their local WCB officer to keep them on the right track.

While Stewart acknowledges that newer technology and training costs money, he points out that the cost is outweighed by the benefits of a safe workplace. “We give our employees a clean environment, good equipment, we care about their safety — in return we have happy employees who work hard.” And keeping employees healthy ensures that they can continue to work hard, which cuts down on time and money spent dealing with accidents and injuries, including rehiring and retraining costs.

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Running a clean shop also means a clean health and safety record with the WCB. Perhaps just as importantly, shops such as Donn Dean Collision help raise standards in an industry that sometimes has difficulty attracting and retaining young people who are concerned about potential health hazards at work. “It pays dividends in the end when your employees are healthy.”

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