



@the window

views on organizational
health + safety + wellness

Summer 2006 volume 1 number 2

What's blooming in this issue?



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@the window Editorial Board

If you have any ideas, or comments for future issues of @ the window or would like to contribute an article, please contact a member of the editorial board.

- Joan Parks-Hubley, Chair ■ PSC
- Valerie Wadman ■ Community Services
- Holly Cameron ■ Resources CSU
- Wanda Pierrynowski ■ PSC, EAP
- Jeff Brett ■ NSGEU
- Ralph Parker ■ CUPE Local 1867
- Adele Poirier ■ Tourism and Culture
- Patti Pike, Executive Champion ■ PSC



OCCUPATIONAL
HEALTH + SAFETY

HEALTHY WORKPLACE



WELCOME TO OUR SECOND ISSUE OF @ THE WINDOW. We're thrilled that so many of you enjoyed the view the first time around. Your comments and feedback about the articles and new layout have truly inspired us!

"What an impressive newsletter! Cheers to you for such a wonderful job! Love the colours and content."

"Excellent newsletter – so alive! Congrats to your team."

"Well done folks. This is an easy read and lots of good information."

"Really enjoyed your newsletter – especially the focus on wellness and healthy workplace. Components of a Healthy Workplace are so relevant to what our staff (including management) need to know because caring about people and giving good direction really helps with workload stress issues."

Now we just have to make sure every issue meets those same high standards!

With summer finally here, the view from our window is changing yet again, with lots of new colourful content coming up in full bloom. In this issue, we're exploring a very hot topic: **Violence in the Workplace.** The Department of Community Services recently won a NAOSH Week Award for their Workplace Violence Prevention Manual. Find out what other departments are doing,

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what your fellow employees are thinking, and what plans are for new government-wide initiatives to keep employees safe from physical, verbal, and emotional assaults. Hand-in-hand with that, we have a **Critical Incident Stress Management** article.

Protecting employees is one way to ensure a positive, productive workplace. Another way is to give you the recognition you deserve for the good work you do. That was the focus of the recent **Recognition Learning Event**. Find out how being proud of our people improves our workplace.

In **Comings and Goings**, we recognize a retiring health and safety specialist and welcome two new health and safety professionals.

In this issue, we're also introducing a new regular feature that celebrates **Success Stories in Wellness**. If you have a success story for us – we want to hear it!

Summer means vacation – and if you're hitting the road to lounge at the cottage, relax on the beach, visit relatives or explore parts unknown, be sure to read our **Summer Road Safety Tips** before you go. Looking out for your safety and wellness is not a 9-5 job! We're thinking of you around the clock and calendar. Tend your emotional health by checking out **Get Nutured By Nature**. Have a safe and healthy break and come back to us well and rested! ■

Recognition Learning Event

“I learned, I laughed, I networked and was inspired”

ON JUNE 6TH, over 70 employees and managers from across government came together to discuss employee recognition, network, and share best practices in an event co-hosted by the Public Service Commission (PSC) and Community Services. It was a full day of learning sessions, presentations, and discussions. As commented by one participant: “I learned, I laughed, I networked and was inspired—thank you!”

Marian Tyson, Deputy Minister for Community Services, and Rick Nurse, Commissioner of the PSC, opened the event and reminded us of the importance of employee recognition and its role in attracting and retaining employees. Presentations made in the morning provided participants with an overview of employee recognition programs at a corporate and departmental level. Most importantly, departments were able to share lessons learned and best practices, which proved to be very valuable to participants.

Howard Windsor, Deputy Minister for the Office of the Premier, was our keynote speaker and spoke to the importance of being proud of our public service, of leading by example and demonstrating our corporate

values in all that we do, including employee recognition. Afternoon discussion tables reviewed topics such as buy-in, roles and responsibilities, the process for getting started with a recognition program, different types of recognition activities, and financial considerations, among others.

Feedback received from participants was very positive:

- “This is exactly the type of corporate approach we need to take to improving our place of employment.”
- “Very timely, informative, need more of these events!”
- “Very helpful... I wish more of my colleagues had attended!”
- “Excellent. Made me feel more connected to my job, government, and employees. I have more pride in my work.”
- “Was a breath of fresh air... Thank you!”

We'd like to thank everyone who participated, and particularly those members from our HR community who presented or volunteered as facilitators. The day would not have been as successful without you! ■

Violence in the Workplace

THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WORKING in the public service who are concerned about their personal safety at work. Some risks are obvious, like working with mechanical equipment or hazardous materials. Yet, the potential for violence is the reality for many public servants.

The Department of Community Services (DCS) is one department whose employees face this reality on a daily basis. Staff members have clients in their offices who are under stress for a variety of reasons. At the same time, other staff members are making home visits—entering unknown circumstances and unfamiliar territory.

In 1998, the department surveyed employees, and one third said workplace violence was an ongoing concern. That was in keeping with Nova Scotia Workers Compensation Board Violence Claims showing that workers in health care and social assistance experience one of the highest rates of workplace violence.

“...workers in health care and social assistance experience one of the highest rates of workplace violence.”

In response, the department decided to develop its own Workplace Violence Prevention/Office Security Manual—a first of its kind in government.

The manual pulls together all existing policies, such as the Corporate OHS Policy, the Personal Protection Policy, the guidelines from the Department of Environment and Labour, the Sexual Harassment/No Discrimination Policy, and more. But then it goes above and beyond to address the unique needs and concerns of DSC staff.

Some of those unique needs include Supervisory Guidelines to Promote Employee Safety in the Field, Home Visit Checklists, and Dog Bite Prevention Guidelines. Even the layout and design of their own

offices is assessed for risk. “Office layout is a major consideration,” says Valerie Wadman, OHS Consultant for the Department. “Think of a traditional office. You go in a door and the (staff) person is against the wall, behind their desk with two chairs in front. If you have a potentially violent person in the office with you, you could be vulnerable as there’s no escape.”

The goal of the manual is to help department staff assess risks, identify and prevent situations, and have a process in place if and when events occur. It’s so comprehensive and detailed, it won the North American Occupational Safety and Health (NAOSH) Award for large organizations for 2006.

Community Services may be the first department to complete its own, unique workplace violence manual, but it is certainly not the only organization addressing this topic. In fact, it’s an issue that is rapidly increasing in priority.

Some may wonder why. Jeff Brett, OHS Officer, Nova Scotia Government Employees Union, has a theory: “The workplace has changed,” says Jeff. “At one time, there was a lot more industry work. But now a larger population of the workforce works in service delivery. People to people. That change provides more opportunity/potential for conflict.

“Sometimes (violence) is seen as a secondary or side issue,” he continues, “because the focus is on another aspect of the operation. Take health care for example. The primary focus is to serve the patient. Something as intangible as interpersonal problems or challenges gets overlooked.”

But it’s an issue that has a profound effect on employees. “It’s a major stressor,” says Jeff. “It’s a distracter and its effects go beyond the workplace. It doesn’t leave the person when they go home at the end of the shift. They take it home with them. They have psychological and physiological reactions. Especially when they know they have to go back to that situation, its unknowns, and the likelihood of a recurrence.”

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Jeff believes that while many policies that state what behaviour is unacceptable identify some good response mechanisms to help once the event has occurred, there is often a gap in accessing the potential for violence before something happens. "Detection of potential behaviour is critical," says Jeff. "Identifying when people get agitated and where you are vulnerable. Support systems are necessary – but hazard assessments and appropriate controls are more effective and meaningful."

Gareth Drinnan, President of the Nova Scotia Highway Workers Union, agrees. "Just like any other health and safety issue, we are taught before we use dangerous goods to read the labels, to make sure we have the personal protective equipment and to know what to do if there's a problem. It's the same with violence in the workplace. You have to learn to assess the situation and react properly to it."

Both Jeff and Gareth point out that clients are not responsible for all violence in the workplace. Some staff also feel the potential for harm could be from co-workers.

Government has many policies in place to protect employees from other co-workers. One of Larry Worthen's jobs, as Human Resource Development Consultant with the Justice Learning Centre, is to get that message out in the Respectful Workplace training programs. "We're trying to ensure there is a respectful workplace so that workplace violence of all kinds can be eliminated," says Larry.

The program explores the provisions of the provincial government Sexual Harassment/No Discrimination policy so that staff are aware of how to deal with concerns about workplace harassment. The course also describes preventative alternatives to formal dispute resolution that can be used in less serious conflicts. This aspect of the training came about because "there was a need to help staff learn skills to deal with issues prior to the conflict escalating and becoming more serious."

According to Larry, staff find the program very helpful. It gives them concrete skills to deal with and resolve interpersonal conflict. A new program called "Leading a Respectful Workplace" was developed last year

for managers and supervisors. To help roll out the program to other departments, a multi-day "train the trainer" session is soon going to take place for anyone in the provincial government interested in training others in this program. Dates are set for Sept. 11-15th. Interested people can contact David Librach at the Justice Learning Centre at 424-7511.

With so many policies, programs, and initiatives in place to protect and support employees, some worry that the sheer volume may be confusing.

"That's one of the concerns that has been raised," says Patti Pike, Executive Director, Strategic Human Resource Management, Public Service Commission. "There's so much out there that by the time a person reviews everything, they may still be unsure as to where to go."

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A Short Course in Human Relations

The 6 most important words:

"I admit I made a mistake."

The 5 most important words:

"You did a good job."

The 4 most important words:

"What is your opinion?"

The 3 most important words:

"If you please."

The 4 most important words:

"Thank you."

The 1 most important word:

"Please."

The least important word:

"I"

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Patti heads up a team that is developing the new, comprehensive Employee Safety and Well-being Policy—a policy that will include all employee protection policies, programs, and initiatives to date, and then expand on them to include “everything else.”

“We’re trying to pull it all together and have a one-stop-shop for employees to go,” says Patti. The goal is make access easier to the full range of support and services available—and then some. It would start with front-end risk assessments and prevention training, then move on to include support.

“We want any employee, for any reason, to be able to call one number, or go online, and talk to an advisor. Then, we want to have investigators or mediators (depending upon what stage the situation is in) that are trained and ready to go out and assist the employee.”

This is separate from the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), Patti stresses. Investigators would do a consultation, have a report turned around within 30 days, and make recommendations.

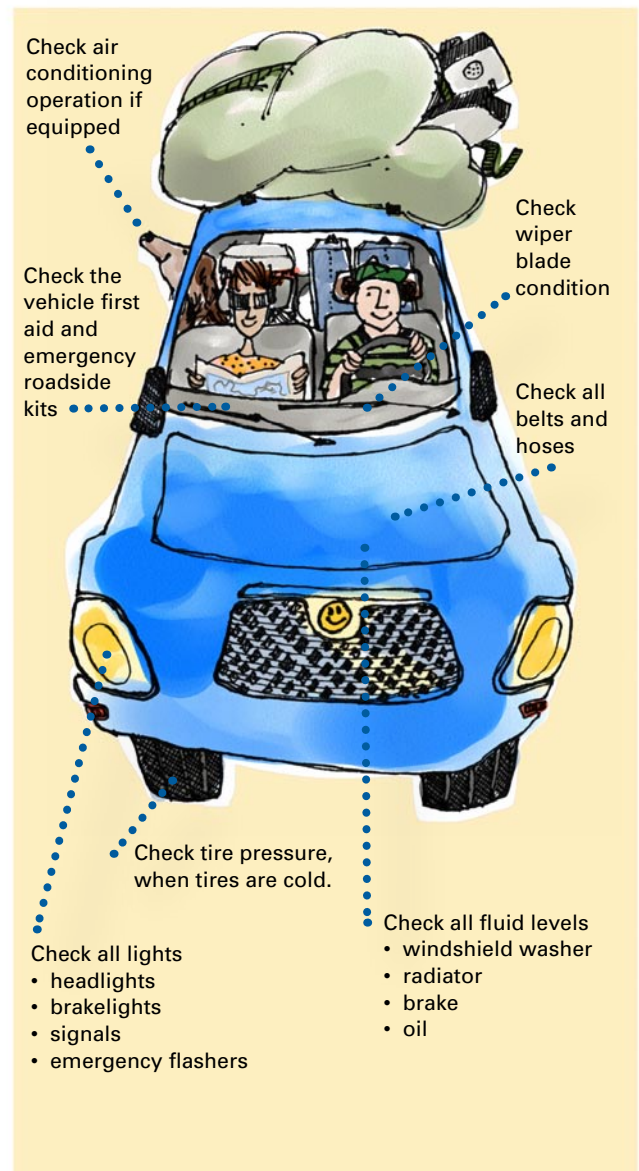
Patti is optimistic that the new policy will go ahead soon, thanks to the support she’s receiving from all departments. She points out that this new policy is in line with remarks made by the Honourable Carolyn Boliver-Getson, former Minister of Environment and Labour, who said, “This year, our business plan calls for us to apply (the health and safety) process to the issue of violence in the workplace. I, like you, am concerned about violence in the workplace and want the best possible outcome. An outcome that protects the workers in this province and will produce results.”

If you’d like to learn more about this hot topic, check out the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) website at www.ccohs.ca (click OHS Answers); download the Department of Environment and Labour Violence in the Workplace: A Guideline at www.gov.ns.ca/enla/healthandsafety/violenceguide.asp, or ask your supervisor about Respectful Workplace training.

Summer Vacation Road Trip Tips

Did you know that more Canadians die on the road during summer months than at any other time of the year?

Before you head out on a road trip, consider this vehicle safety checklist.



For more information, go to the Canada Safety Council <http://www.safety-council.org/info/traffic/sumdriv.htm>

PATRICK O'MALLEY, MOTOR VEHICLE INSPECTOR,
SERVICE NOVA SCOTIA AND MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

Success Stories in Wellness

A Success Story Submitted by Roland Beaman

Are you eating healthier? Reducing your stress? Losing weight? If you've made healthy lifestyle changes, we would like to feature your success story. Roland Beaman is one of many people who have made changes to improve their overall health. Here is his story.

"Hello, I'm Roland Beaman and I work at the Kentville Justice Centre in Sheriff Services. I got involved with the wellness program when it first started and decided to lose

some weight. I changed my whole way of eating and gave up sweets, pop, chips and fried foods to give it a try.

I ate healthy foods such as salads, veggies and baked chicken, fish and meats with no added fats. I drank lots of water at home and at work. I also did not eat after supper and if I got the munchies I had water and an apple or yogurt.

I did this for a seven month period and lost 47 lbs. of my weight and went from a 44" waist to a 38" waist. The good part is I did this just by changing my eating habits.

As of now I am holding the weight off and feel great and have more energy than I did before. My wife did this with me and she lost 56 lbs. and went down two sizes in her clothes, so stay fit and eat healthy." ■

Congratulations, Roland, on a job well done!

Reprinted with permission from "Healthy LifeWorks" Volume 2, Issue 4, May 2004



Sydney Weight Watchers Challenge

The Sydney Provincial Building hosted a 12-week Weight Watchers At-Work program over the winter. The group of 15 accumulated a total weight loss of 226 pounds in that time ! Now we are on our second series of 12 weeks. We are challenging any office in the province to beat our weight loss total in a 12 week period ! Come on, take it off !



Above are some of the Community Services staff who attended, from left to right :

BACK ROW : Diane Clarke, Phyllis Wilton, Diane MacDonald

FRONT ROW : Melissa MacLeod, Sheila Van Schaick, and Barb Tryon.

Missing was Donnie MacKenzie, Elaine Noseworthy, Denise Martell, and Cynthia Stevenson ■

SHEILA VAN SCHAICK, SOFTWARE SUPPORT, DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

We feel Roland was successful because he:

- Lost weight slowly—he lost an average of 1.5 lbs. per week
- Ate a variety of foods from Canada's Good Guide to Healthy Eating
- Drank more water
- Avoided high fat and high calorie foods
- Made changes he could live with for a lifetime

We feel this group was successful because they:

- Ate a variety of foods from Canada's Food Guide for Healthy Eating
- Drank more water
- Lost weight slowly—an average of 1.5 lbs. per week.
- Had strong group support and encouragement
- Incorporated increased physical activity and made lifestyle changes they could live with for a lifetime

CISM

Critical Incident Stress Management Services

What is a Critical Incident?

A critical incident is an unexpected traumatic event that triggers a normal emotional response with victims or witnesses that can be overwhelming and has the potential to interfere with the coping skills of those affected.

Some examples of critical incidents include:

- physical/verbal assaults
- indirect threats of harm (bomb threats)
- robberies/hold-ups
- a threat to one's life
- attack by an animal causing bodily harm
- finding suspicious harmful agents
- sudden or near death of a client or co-worker at the workplace
- exposure to motor vehicle accidents and/ or casualties

Benefits of CISM Services

- CISM services educate employees on self-care and how to access further assistance

Who provides CISM Services?

Nova Scotia Government now offers a comprehensive, consistent and accessible 24/7 CISM program with Health Canada as our provider.

(Please note: This arrangement with Health Canada to provide CISM Services is not to replace any current CISM programs that are already working in departments.)

Accessing CISM Services

Calls received by the NS Government EAP staff during regular business hours requiring CISM services are transferred to Health Canada to receive appropriate and timely CISM interventions. When CISM services are required after hours, calls to the EAP line will reach Health Canada directly and receive immediate assistance.

Managers can coordinate the CISM services for their staff by calling EAP and appropriate CISM Services will be recommended by Health Canada. Individual employees can contact EAP as well if they have experienced a critical incident and would like to access CISM services and/or counselling.

Pre-Incident Awareness Activities

Watch for upcoming Pre-Incident Awareness Activities in your department in 2006-07 which will educate employees and managers on:

- the definition of a critical incident
- how to access CISM services
- the types of CISM services available
- the type and timeliness of a CISM response to expect
- materials available for employee self-care ■

For further information please contact EAP at 424-7948 or 1-800-777-5888.

WANDA PIERRYNOWSKI, RSW, EAP CONSULTANT

Comings and Goings

Ralph Parker is retiring after 29 years of dedicated service with government. He was most recently Acting Loss Control Specialist in the Western Region of the Department of Transportation and Public Works. Ralph was known for his strong commitment to OHS and made significant contributions in the areas of training and auditing. Ralph was also the CUPE representative on the @ the Window Editorial Board. We know he'll have lots of new views in retirement. All the best from your colleagues and the @ the Window team.

Laurence MacDonald has joined the Department of Transportation and Public Works as the Loss Control Specialist for Central District Highway Operations. He is based in Bedford. Laurence brings with him a wealth of experience from Sobeys and Trenton Works

Ltd. where he was most recently the Manager of OHS. Laurence replaces **Karen Michael King** who is now the OH&S Consultant.

Shaun Legget has recently joined the Department of Transportation and Public Works as the Loss Control Specialist for Western District Highways Operations. He is based out of Bridgewater. Shaun came to government from the private sector where he worked with Municipal Contracting / Dexter Construction. He brings with him valuable experience as the former Health and Safety Manager on the harbour clean-up project. Shaun replaces **Jeff Brett** who is now at NSGEU as the OHS Officer. ■

Good Luck to everyone in their new ventures!

Get Nurtured by Nature

DID YOU KNOW YOU COULD GARDEN YOUR WAY TO WELL-BEING? It has been reported that gardening is the second most popular physical activity in Canada but its protective role in mental health may not be as well understood.

It turns out quietly tending your garden is a stress buster. "There is something magical and curative about the powers of nature as seen in the growth of a plant," according to Mitchell Hewson, a horticultural therapist at Homewood Health Centre in Guelph. It allows you to think about things that have been bothering you or to daydream. Other benefits include increased self-esteem, better sleep patterns and learning patience.

Gardening provides a break from the rush of life. In a 2003 British report on work-life balance, the Mental



Health Foundation found that 41% of respondents sacrificed their hobbies and pastimes by working too long. This could increase the risk of developing future mental health problems.

Don't have a garden or any space to dig in the dirt? You can visit the local community or Public Gardens. Research at the University of Florida has found that just walking around a botanical garden helps lower people's stress levels. You could also offer to help a senior or another person with their garden.

As we head into the summer, there is no better time or way to improve your mental health than by getting out in the garden or surrounding yourself by nature.

JOAN PARKS-HUBLEY, PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION