

Oregon OSHA helps Oregon employers improve business

Tara O'Keeffe-Broadbent was a bit anxious when she invited a consultant from Oregon OSHA to evaluate the safety and health program of her Sisters-based family business.

“My expectation was that with the Oregon OSHA consultant here we were being inspected,” said O'Keeffe-Broadbent, founder and president of O'Keeffe's Company, which makes skin-therapy products. “Instead, it was a more like having a business partner come in, someone who could point out things that may come up later in your business. The consultants were not critical of us in any way.”

Oregon OSHA safety and health professionals provide no-cost consultations at more than 2,000 worksites each year across the state. Consultations, conducted at the request of an employer, evaluate any or all aspects of worksite occupational safety and health. The employer determines the scope of the evaluation. Oregon OSHA provides employers receiving a consultation a report summarizing the visit, including recommendations for improvement. Consultations are kept confidential from Oregon OSHA's enforcement program.

O'Keeffe's Company has manufactured its Working Hands and Working Feet skin-therapy products in Sisters since 2001. O'Keeffe-Broadbent developed The Working Hands and Working Feet products to help her father, a rancher in the Klamath Basin who suffered from dried, cracked hands and feet despite having tried numerous skin-care treatments and prescription medications. After several years of experimentation, she came up with a product that healed her father's split, cracked skin. In 2002, the company won the Austin Family Business Award sponsored by Oregon State University for best small business owned by a woman.

“The Oregon OSHA consultant helped O'Keeffe's look at our processes, not only regarding safety but also from the standpoint of efficiency,” O'Keeffe-Broadbent said. “When you become aware of safety, you also become very aware of efficiency. We are a manufacturing facility, so looking at this business through ‘safety eyes’ has increased our efficiency and it's also increased our productivity.”

In addition to evaluating workplace safety and health, Oregon OSHA consultants frequently draw upon their expertise to help suggest process improvements.

“I think the labeling recommendations for our chemicals have helped improve sales,” O'Keeffe-Broadbent said. “We manufacture hand or foot creams, and most components used in our process are white powders. We have become aware of labeling every single chemical and powder. We've never had the wrong ingredient get into a batch because every single element is correctly labeled – a recommendation that our Oregon OSHA consultant had. I can see how having a bad batch released to the public could have cost us several thousand dollars, both in product liability and hurting our brand.”

The Oregon OSHA consultant can also provide information about the Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program (SHARP), a certification that only 123 worksites in the state can take pride in. O'Keeffe's applied its consultant's recommendations and qualified for certification in Oregon OSHA's SHARP program in 2004.

"People were nervous about the process of being inspected, and the result turned out to be the complete opposite; she put us all at ease," O'Keeffe-Broadbent said. "Our people are very team-spirited and very excited when we received our SHARP award; that was nothing like I expected I would go through with an OSHA experience - It's just been totally different than my expectation."

O'Keeffe-Broadbent found the experience educational, too.

"I wasn't aware of possible safety hazards around the workplace," she said. "We've had zero accidents but I appreciate being aware of the hazards, as we want to keep it that way. Oregon OSHA was so helpful in making us aware of where workplace hazards could be in the future. We've always set high standards for health and safety in our workplace, and this demonstrates the commitment of management and our employees to maintain an injury-free environment."

For businesses where incidents and injuries do occur, the recommendation of the Oregon OSHA consultant can translate to reduced injuries and reduced workers' compensation costs.

Oregon OSHA consultants can recommend safety and health management practices that produce a tangible bottom-line result for employers. Some recent examples of injury reductions resulting from consultations:

- Georgia-Pacific Philomath reduced its workers' compensation costs 80 percent and established an injury rate 72 percent below the industry average.
- Roseburg Forest Products Coquille reduced its injury rate 80 percent within five years.
- Timber Products has saved more than \$100,000 per year in workers' compensation costs while process improvements reduced quality problems by 90 percent.
- The city of Portland's Columbia Wastewater Treatment Plant reduced its lost-workday injury cases 79 percent and reduced annual workers' compensation costs 64 percent through ongoing collaboration with Oregon OSHA's consultation program and SHARP.

Oregon OSHA consultants can help your business in a number of ways – the decision is yours:

- New-business consultations: If you are starting a business, expanding a current business, or relocating to Oregon, a consultant can review your programs and provide practical, economic recommendations for operating a safe workplace.
- Safety consultations: Oregon OSHA safety consultants will examine your workplace for safety hazards, review your written programs, and evaluate your

- existing safety and health program and the physical layout of your business to help you eliminate and prevent hazards.
- Ergonomic consultations: An ergonomic consultant will help you identify ergonomic risks and help you develop a safety and health program that can prevent strains and sprains, cumulative trauma disorders, and repetitive-motion problems.
 - Health consultations: During a health consultation, an industrial hygiene professional evaluates your worksite for potential health hazards involving chemicals, noise, biological agents, and air contaminants. The industrial hygienist also reviews the effectiveness of written safety and health programs in controlling or eliminating hazards.

No matter what the specialized needs of your business are, Oregon OSHA consultants can show you how simple it is to incorporate the basics of effective safety and health management into your workplace.

“I would recommend the consultation program to anyone,” O’Keeffe-Broadbent said. “We learned a lot and it pulled us together as a team. Anytime you can create a better team atmosphere at work, you’re ahead.”

For more information about Oregon OSHA free, confidential safety and health consultations, call (800) 922-2689 or visit Oregon OSHA on the Web at **www.orosha.org**

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