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Five ways to ensure a routine WSIB claim stays routine

The Safety Issue
Welcome to Ontario, CoR!
Billed as the next step in health and safety management after Safety Groups, the CoR program is now officially up and running in Ontario.

The secret behind the success of GVCA Safety Groups

Improve your health and safety program today
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The next level in safety

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I have before me a report from the Ministry of Labour that summarizes the total number of accidents that have occurred on construction sites during the first three quarters of this year. In September alone, five people suffered critical injuries. That figure that brings the total number of accidents to 97 for the year to date. The report also shows that there have been 10 deaths on construction sites so far this year.

Let me ask you this: is this good news or bad? You might argue it’s good news. And to some extent it is. When you think of the number of person days’ worth of work logged by people in our industry during the first nine months of any calendar year, fewer than 100 critical accidents could be considered a good thing. I don’t have exact figures in front of me right now, but it’s a sure bet to suggest that the rate of critical accidents per worker day in Ontario is, statistically speaking, miniscule.

On the other hand, try telling that side of the story to a worker who fell 15 feet and broke both her legs. Or another that was struck by a piece of equipment and has suffered permanent head trauma. Or another that received severe burns on his hands and face as a result of an electrocution. Or another that cut off her finger… The list goes on.

The reality is that workplace injuries are preventable and unacceptable. Yet every year in this part of the world we see only small improvements (or worsenings) in our collective accident histories. Numbers fluctuate annually but seldom significantly and not for some years by any degree that might be considered an identifiable trend.

So what has to change? What can any of us to do work safer? We all pay homage to the idea that safety is paramount (some of us live that notion better than others, of course), but at what point does the proverbial other shoe drop? When do we change our approaches to an aspect of our work that I dare say is just as important as actually delivering the structures we build?

Why not now? There are probably a dozen places from which you could start improving your health and safety program. Enroll in any of the educational courses that GVCA offers. Sign up for our Safety Group. Get the ball rolling on CoR certification. Learn how to write a better occupational health and safety policy. Take some tips from an expert on how to give better site safety talks. Or simply sit down in your office, close your door and have a long, hard think about your company’s safety culture and list some ways to make it stronger and more compelling for everyone.

It’s not hard to work safer. It just requires a change in mindset.

**AS I WRITE THIS PIECE.** I have before me a report from the Ministry of Labour that summarizes the total number of accidents that have occurred on construction sites during the first three quarters of this year. In September alone, five people suffered critical injuries. That figure that brings the total number of accidents to 97 for the year to date. The report also shows that there have been 10 deaths on construction sites so far this year.

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Go on, be a leader!

When it comes to workplace health and safety, I think most companies fall into any of three categories. There are those that I’d characterize as “watch me” companies. In other words, they lead the pack. They set high standards for themselves and their site partners and strive constantly to exceed expectations from owners, regulators and colleagues. I’d call the second group the “show me” group. These are companies that, by and large, do well, but sometimes need a nudge to move from good to great. And then there are the firms that fall into the “make me” category. Sometimes, these companies have to wait until something goes wrong on their sites before they see opportunities to change their systems.

I’m sure that being established, reputable firms, most GVCA members fall into either of the “watch me” or “show me” categories. And while everyone would doubtless like to belong in the “watch me” category, it might be hard to make that jump. I don’t claim to know everything about health and safety, but I do know a bit about what takes companies from good to great. It’s leadership. And a key component of leadership is the quality of always striving to improve.

If you ask me, workplace health and safety shouldn’t be about reacting to events. It should be a continuous process of planning and assessment. Think about it. The top performing companies in our industry don’t wait for accidents to happen to improve their systems. They constantly assess and re-assess their protocols, looking for strengths and weaknesses. They commit resources to supporting weaknesses and they extract the lessons learned from the strengths of their programs and apply them to other areas of their businesses.

Of course, all this is well and good for the largest companies in our business. They can afford to put significant time and effort into scrutinizing the smallest aspects of their operations. That’s not the case for the small, five-person operations whose resources are spread thinner. And while I’d argue that this is a fair comment, let me say two things. First, that your occupational health and safety program isn’t a static document. It’s a living thing that needs to be adapted and revised by every firm—large or small—with each passing job and each lesson learned. To think anything else is simply outdated.

The second thing I’d say is that the cost of taking time to refine your health and safety plan is far, far less than the cost of reacting to an accident. In other words, don’t rest on your laurels, waiting for something to go wrong. Act now. Today. Take the time to look at your safety policy and make sure it’s as good as it can be. And if it’s not, think about what you can do to improve. (Joining GVCA’s Safety Group might be a great place to start, for example.)

When it comes to health and safety, never settle. Go on, be a leader.
Risks to avoid when managing your assets

AS A BUSINESS OWNER, you’ve worked hard to accumulate your assets, so it is important to take precautions to protect them from risk. The following strategies may help.

Strategies to protect personal assets

Gifting assets. If you gift assets to family members you may reduce the amount of assets that may be available to your creditors, but bear in mind that those assets may now be at risk from creditors of the family members who receive them. Unless the gift is to a spouse, it’s considered a sale at fair market value for Canadian tax purposes and could potentially trigger capital gains taxes.

Using insurance. Depending on the province where you live, placing funds in an insurance policy (life or segregated funds) may safeguard them from potential future claims. In many cases, the investment component of an insurance policy and the interests of the beneficiaries under the insurance policy may offer protection from the claims of creditors.

Sheltering assets within registered plans. Funds in a Registered Retirement Savings Plan are potentially protected from creditors. Have you considered an Individual Pension Plan (IPP)?

Transferring assets to a formal trust. The legal ownership of the assets passes to the trustee so, if properly structured, these assets could be protected from future creditors. However, you may lose control over the funds transferred, depending on the nature of the trust. Determine whether you can afford to transfer control of those assets. Remember there could be significant tax implications to placing assets in a trust, so obtain professional advice to ensure you understand the consequences before you make a decision.

Ways to safeguard your business

When you’re working on a strategy to protect your business assets from risk, certain actions can create the impression that you intend to put assets beyond the reach of creditors. This can work against you in the event of a lawsuit and can be particularly important if your company is experiencing financial difficulties. Try to avoid:

- transferring property for less than fair market value,
- paying for property by cash instead of cheque,
- transferring property without proper documentation,
- transferring property where the transferring person retains an ongoing interest or continues to behave like the property owner, and
- transferring property without a change in possession.

Benefits of incorporation. Incorporating your business may be one way to protect personal assets. As an owner-manager, you are only liable to the extent of your shareholding, therefore you are not personally liable for the debts of the company. Compare this with sole proprietors, who are personally liable for all the debts and obligations of their businesses and partnerships where you can be personally liable for the actions of other partners. However, if you do incorporate, be careful about giving personal guarantees for loans to your business. The protection provided by incorporation can be lost in such a case and you could be personally liable for repayment of the loan.

Surplus assets in your business. Aim to keep cash reserves as low as possible. If you have accumulated surplus assets in your business that you don’t need for operating expenses, consider transferring them to a holding company. This can help protect them from creditors of the operating company. You should also consider the pros and cons of having your company contribute to an IPP. This can help boost your retirement funds and assets in an IPP are creditor protected.

Prepare for the unexpected. Do you have a plan to cover the potential loss of a key person? Planning ahead can help you limit the damage to the business you have worked so hard to build. You protect yourself by insuring against risks like fire, damage to your premises and theft of equipment, but an unforeseen event for which you haven’t planned can seriously affect your ability to serve your customers. This can be detrimental to the value of your business company morale and business performance.

Be proactive

There are many ways to be proactive and protect both the business and family assets that you have worked so hard and used so many personal resources to achieve. The ability to run your business efficiently and effectively by minimizing risk can be covered by focusing on the above strategies. Call your advisor for more information.

This article is supplied by Erica Tennenbaum, Vice President, Investment Advisor with RBC Dominion Securities Inc. Member-Canadian Investor Protection Fund. Erica can be reached at Erica.tennenbaum@rbc.com or 519-621-1307.

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The human factor in construction safety

CRITICAL INJURIES AND FATALITIES are still, unfortunately, not uncommon in the Ontario construction industry. In 2011 alone there were 22 deaths and 134 critical injuries in this sector of the Ontario economy.

The operation of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) is largely based on an internal responsibility system that requires the participation of workers, supervisors, employers, constructors and joint health and safety committees or health and safety representatives. However some occasions require the direct intervention of Ministry of Labour personnel. In the case of a critical injury or fatality, and other events it is the duty of the employer and the constructor to make contact with the Ministry so that it can fulfill its role.

The requirements of the OHSA are, of course, matters of law. By definition they are dry and almost antiseptic. At its heart, the act and its regulations impose on employers, constructors and supervisors an obligation to exercise “due diligence” when it comes to the prevention of accidents. In addition to the specific requirements of the statute and regulations, there is the general requirement to take “…all precautions reasonable in the circumstances…” to protect the safety of those persons on a construction site. It can be said, then, that if every reasonable precaution has been taken, due diligence has been demonstrated. The problem is, of course, in determining what every reasonable precaution means in each circumstance.

Over the years our firm has been involved in far too many cases where there has been a death or a critical injury in the workplace. It is fair to say that in every single case the employer and supervisor cared about workers’ safety. They wanted to ensure that everyone who worked for them went home safely at the end of the day and they wanted to comply with the law. And yet fatalities and injuries still occurred.

I can say that in every case but one, the cause of the accident was easily seen in hindsight and was, therefore, preventable.

As I indicated above, the act and its regulations are very dry and, at least, superficially easy to comply with. There are very few elements that have not been considered. Virtually every step in the process of construction has been taken into account and been made the subject of regulatory requirements: the use of fall arrest; the barricading of access points; the securing of ladders; procedures for working in confined spaces, etc. And yet fatalities and critical injuries still occur.

It seems almost incomprehensible that with such a sophisticated and comprehensive set of rules and directions that such should be the case. One must ask why? What is missing? What can be the cause? The answer, in my experience, is simple: it is the human factor.

Most of us know very few—if any—people that we would consider malicious or “bad”—someone who would willfully or deliberately create an environment that results in injury to another person. At worst, we may know people who are negligent or who simply don’t have the capacity to understand the harm their conduct may cause.

What I think is missing is the simple recognition that each of us is capable of being blind to danger and, conversely, of being blind to the capacity of others to do the same.

One clear answer to this human failing is to assume, as supervisors and constructors, that those people for whom we are responsible will, in fact, engage in highly dangerous behaviour. That they will fall while wearing proper fall arrest equipment which they have failed to tie off. That they will put an extension ladder up against a live power line. That they will walk into the path of operating heavy equipment. That they will even go so far as to step over a safety barricade to retrieve a tool, and fall down an elevator shaft.

In each of these examples (all of which actually happened), the employer was diligent; the supervisors were present and trained; and the company’s safety officers were active and efficient. And in each case, a worker was killed.

There is, in my view, danger in assuming that simple compliance with the dry words and requirements of health and safety legislation is sufficient. Clearly it isn’t. Instead, think of it as a starting point. Due diligence requires that you go further. Assume that people will either forget to, or choose not to wear fall arrest equipment. Assume that some of those for whom you are responsible will have distractions in their personal lives and be thinking about those matters rather than the proximity of power lines to their extension ladder. Assume that people are prepared to make a calculated gamble that they won’t lose their balance at the edge of a slab or while retrieving a tool by an elevator shaft.

Simply put, you should recognize that all of the dry and well intentioned legislation—regardless of how well written or well thought out—is most often no match for human failing.

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Welcome to Ontario, CoR!

Billed as the next step in health and safety management after Safety Groups, the CoR program is now officially up and running in Ontario.

A NATIONAL HEALTH-AND-SAFETY certification program finally has a champion in Ontario.

Already widely in use in other parts of Canada, the Certificate of Recognition (CoR) program helps employers create effective health-and-safety management systems. In late 2011, the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association (IHSA) opted to facilitate CoR’s formal introduction in Ontario. A year later, 18 Ontario firms are now CoR certified and, according to IHSA, hundreds more have registered with the program.

Employers who enroll in CoR are tasked with building health-and-safety management systems. Such systems will address 19 elements that span a range of subjects from hazard analysis to personal protective equipment, and some of which are unique to Ontario’s regulatory regime. Once the company has created its health-and-safety management system, an employee who has been trained as a CoR auditor will review the plan for compliance with the 19 elements. That internal audit will be followed closely by an audit led by a trained official from IHSA. If the company’s system passes both audits, the business will receive its Certificate of Recognition and a letter in good standing.

To maintain its good standing in the CoR program, the company must complete internal audits of its system in each of the next two years. A company’s CoR certification expires after three years, and the business must re-apply to the program in the fourth year and re-build its health-and-safety-management system accordingly.

“CoR proves to construction buyers that a contractor’s health and safety management system is not only in place, but has also been evaluated on a regular basis to ensure currency and effectiveness,” says Paul Casey, IHSA’s manager of CoR. “Employers who have participated in the WSIB Safety Groups program will be familiar with many of the requirements of CoR. Its elements are similar to those of Safety Group’s. They examine matters such as developing controls and creating risk awareness. CoR, however, requires firms to audit their practices more regularly.”
One of the chief differences—and benefits—of CoR as compared to Safety Groups is CoR’s acceptance across the country. Created by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, Safety Groups was best recognized within Ontario only. CoR is a national program that’s recognized as a benchmark for excellence in health and safety systems across the country and among many industries.

The benefits don’t end there, says Casey.
“[CoR] has been shown to drive change for health and safety management within certified companies, and improve processes to maintain performance and compliance,” he says. “What’s more, construction buyers who see CoR certification will have the confidence that a contractor is working to a recognized, leading standard for safety performance. It should help reduce bidding and tendering complexities, and be a useful tool for pre-qualification.”

AECON is among the 18 Ontario firms to have already received CoR certification. The company’s vice-president of safety and loss control, Mike Archambault, is a firm believer in the program.

“What’s special about CoR is that it requires companies to take a proactive approach to safety, rather than a reactive one,” he says. “It forces you to look at the types of inspections and the types of audits you’re doing, as well as the procedures you have in place to prevent accidents. It’s about driving safer behaviour rather than reacting to accidents.”

Although the cost to implement CoR for a small firm might be somewhere around $5,000, the cost of not doing so could be far greater.

“Think of the cost this way,” says Archambault. “You can either spend $5,000 to improve your company’s systems and processes to prevent jobsite accidents, or you can spend that much or more to react to an accident after it happens. That decision’s a no-brainer.”

**A proven model**

Although CoR is still relatively new to Ontario, its introduction in Ontario has been driven by a number of factors. First, the concept has been proven successful in other parts of the country. CoR was created in Alberta in the late 1980s as a joint initiative among construction companies, employer associations and safety associations as a way of demonstrating safety procedures to construction buyers in the oil and gas sectors. It didn’t take long before CoR became the principal pre-qualification tool for bidding on large-scale engineering-type construction projects in the province.

Second, many larger contractors who also work outside Ontario—such as AECON—will have already obtained CoR certification to bid on projects in other provinces.

Third, IHSA has practice-tested its CoR systems with a group of construction employers. Contractors across the province were invited to participate in a trial program that concluded in March. A large number of those firms were members of the Ontario General Contractors Association, and the association’s director of government relations, David Frame, reports good success.

“A lot of the feedback we’ve had on the program to date has been from members who were unable to participate,” he says. “They say they’ve heard great things about CoR and want to know when they can enroll.”

IHSA officially launched CoR last spring. To promote the program, the group is actively marketing through the IHSA website. But once in the initial surge of enthusiasm for the program subsides, IHSA may be faced with a tougher battle to promote the program. While CoR certification is a condition of contract for construction work in other parts of the country, it’s a largely unknown quantity in Ontario. And since there is currently no push from owners to require the contractors they employ to have CoR certification, the program requires a champion from outside industry.

“If CoR is to become successful, its use must be required by owners,” says Frame. “I think you’ll start to see owners request CoR certification in 12 to 18 months or so. After that, hopefully the Ministry of Labour’s prevention office will put CoR in place as a pre-qualification for all provincial construction work.”

For more information on CoR, visit www.ihsa.ca.

“What’s special about CoR is that it requires companies to take a proactive approach to safety, rather than a reactive one,”
Ellaline Davies: The secret behind the success of GVCA’s Safety Groups
She’s a Tough Taskmaster who doesn’t flinch at telling the bitter truth. She knows that sugar coating won’t help. When it comes to things that matter such as safety, Ellaline Davies pulls no punches and people are better off for it. If Davies gets her way, and she usually does, the only thing that gets hurt is people’s feelings. But that’s the price a GVCA Safety Group member pays if he or she fails to do homework or turns in shoddy work. Facing Davies’ disapproval is not fun, but the alternative—not having effective health and safety policies and procedures—can be deadly. Davies is in it to save lives, prevent injuries and keep construction-related companies thriving. As the facilitator of GVCA Safety Group, now in its fifth year, Davies understands that with the rapidly changing safety standards and legislation in the province, most construction companies don’t stand a chance of staying on top of what’s happening without the help of well run safety groups.

“The safety landscape in Ontario is changing exponentially and people are having a hard time keeping up,” says Davies. “All of a sudden companies who have had a health and safety program are realizing that they aren’t at par. They are worried about the liability of being ill prepared. They have to take action.”

Safety groups are relative newcomers to the construction world—the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) introduced them in 2000—but they are proving highly effective, particularly when the group’s sponsor invests in a facilitator to ensure members get the most out of it. While most safety groups run just four meetings a year, under the tutelage of Davies, president of Safety Works, the GVCA group has nine meetings per year. Plus Davies brings in specialist speakers who address key pieces of legislation and the impact they have on safety in the workplace.

With 15 Safety Groups in Ontario, the GVCA’s model of having Davies facilitate the meetings is more expensive (the extra cost is paid by the participating members) but the return on investment is well worth it—and not just for the rebate cheques.

“I tell my members that safety is a great big bloody roulette wheel, and you don’t know when your number will be up. You have to be prepared for this because no one can help you after the fact. People have no concept of how much not doing a safety program costs,” emphasize Davies. She says she gets a few calls a year from desperate construction companies who are facing WSIB penalties because of an on-the-job accident. “Unless they have proof of a program, with workers trained, supervisors trained, log books and all the paperwork, there is nothing I can do to help you. It’s due diligence and making sure everyone follows a safety culture.”

Graphic above courtesy WSIB
Safety culture

In 2007, when the GVCA launched this safety group, the decision to add Davies as facilitator was a “no brainer” says GVCA president Martha George. “Ellaline brings a huge knowledge base and understanding of how to build a true culture of safety in any construction firm. No one ever feels as though they are wasting their time: what Ellaline brings is invaluable and our members know it. Without her facilitation skills and knowledge of current safety legislation and practice, we would not be as successful as we are.”

It’s the creation of a true safety culture that drives Davies to do what she does. She knows from empirical evidence that companies that believe that safety is everyone’s responsibility and champion it at every level—including by investing in continual training—will prevent injuries and send their workers home safe every night. To Davies and other safety professionals, there are no accidents in a safety culture, only people who failed to follow safety procedures due to lack of training, knowledge or supervision. For those workers who have been trained to the highest standards available but refuse to follow the safety procedures Davies has no mercy.

“Fire them immediately,” she counsels. “Their failure to work safely can take a whole company down with them. When I see a guy who is not tied off [on a scaffold], I ask was he trained? Was the time and money spent by the company to ensure he had the proper knowledge base? Was the supervisor trained? I go through the list and if the answer is yes, and it often is, then we have a huge problem. That guy can ruin that company, and there is no excuse to keep him on. You can’t care if he’s been there forever or you need so many men on the job site. An unsafe worker is a liability.”

This no-nonsense attitude is like Buckley’s Cough Syrup to some people: it’s hard to swallow. “The first year people join the GVCA Safety Group, there is lots of complaining about the process. It is a lot of work, but by the middle of year two, their attitudes have changed,” says Davies.

Astrit Toffolo of Tosca Tile agrees. She knows how difficult it can be to implement a top-notch safety program. “At times it required me to hound the workers for co-operation and documentation, but they now see the value of our GVCA safety program [because] they remain safe and go home safe,” she says. “Since we joined the GVCA Safety Group in 2009, Tosca Tile has shown remarkable progress through the high standards that Ellaline has set for the group. I believe that her coaching has saved Tosca Tile from huge WSIB claims.”

Safer workers, fewer WSIB claims: evidence like this proves Davies is definitely doing things right.
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What I learned at Safety Groups

GVCA members tell us some of the remarkable—or just plain practical—things they’ve learned while participating in Safety Groups.

YOU PROBABLY ALREADY KNOW that Safety Groups is all about building effective health and safety programs. It’s about ensuring your employees work to high performance standards in areas such as ergonomics, confined space entry and slips, trips and falls. It’s also about discussing new approaches with fellow group members and learning from one another’s experiences to improve everyone’s performance. In other words, Safety Groups is about learning. Because when it comes to health and safety, you can never know too much.

We asked a few GVCA members to share some of the truly remarkable things they’ve learned during their time in Safety Groups.

“The big thing for us is that we’ve overhauled our return to work program. It’s expanded enormously, and in ways that we probably never would have thought of without the help of our fellow group members.”

– Nicole Luyben-Fitzpatrick, Kappeler Masonry Corporation

“One of the really meaningful things we took away was the idea to create a health and safety board in our office. We ask everyone to pin pictures of their spouses, children and other family members to the board to remind everyone of the importance of working safe and coming home at the end of every work day.”

“We’re also communicating more about health and safety than we ever did. Everyone’s attitude has changed and everyone from the owner on down is on board with the program.”

– Teresa Palubeskie, Slotegraaf Construction Inc.

“We’ve developed our own scaffold set-up and safety reporting system through Safety Groups. We’ve also created a new system for laying planks over stairways in areas where we can’t put up scaffolding.”

– Jason John, Gold Star Drywall

“We learned a lot more about the everyday procedures we follow. For example, we learned about the dangers of suspension trauma and the proper procedures for rescuing someone who’s just had a fall and is hanging by his or her PPE.”

– Jayne Pauls, Kraun Electric

“We’re now providing every employee with a personalized safety backpack that contains things like a fall arrest harness, a hard hat and safety glasses. We’ve also beefed up our first aid bins and kits with not only new equipment, but also injury procedure books and guarantees of monthly inspections by our safety team. Finally, we’re doing our own jobsite health and safety inspections over and above anything the constructor normally does, just to make sure every base is covered.”

– Mark Stecho, Harold Stecho Electric

“Because of the time we put into Safety Groups, we’ve come along way with our health and safety manual. To the point where one client actually used it as an example of what other subtrades should be doing. That was really gratifying.”

“Safety Groups also helped us with a recent audit by the Ministry of Labour. Before the auditors arrived on site, we laid out everything we prepared and learned from Safety Groups. The auditor was so impressed with how organized we were and how complete our paperwork was that the audit lasted less than 20 minutes.”

– Linda Wey, HC Matcon

Want to be like any of these people? Join GVCA’s Safety Groups today and learn about new approaches to health and safety.
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Gold Seal certificates hanging on the wall at Melloul-Blamey’s office, “I knew wanted to have my own,” says Mike George, the safety coordinator at Melloul-Blamey Construction (MB). “Gold Seal really means something. It shows you have knowledge, training and experience.”

Four years ago, George signed up for the Gold Seal Certified Construction Safety Coordinator course offered through the GVCA. After a lot of hard work, he too was able to hang a framed certificate on the wall at MB. But he knows what’s really important is not the physical certificate but his increased ability to implement and maintain a strong safety culture in his company.

When the Gold Seal certification for safety coordinators was launched in January 2007, it became the latest certification in the construction industry joining project managers, superintendents, estimators and owners. At the last count, there are 112 GSC Safety Coordinators in Ontario, with another seven with the Professional Gold Seal Certified designation.

For George, who was the former chief Waterloo Fire Department fire prevention officer for 30 years before joining MB in 2004, the GSC designation gave him the added tools to be a more effective safety coordinator. It also gave him extra credibility on the jobsite.
“You do get more respect when you have those initials behind your name,” acknowledges George. “But you have prove it on the jobsite.” This proof is evident by the fact that Melloul-Blamey has not had a lost-time incident in more than five years and workers gladly take the little bit of extra time to ensure everything they do is performed safely. “It’s better to take a minute out of your life, then to take your life in a minute,” quotes George. “One of my workers said that. It’s always stuck with me.”

George’s Gold Seal training has given him a more comprehensive view of safety. It’s not just about the Melloul-Blamey guys, it’s about everyone connected to every job.

“I don’t just look at our guys on the jobsite for safety and potential hazards, I look at everyone. The roofers, the plumbers, the guys doing formwork and trenching… everyone on the job,” says George. “We are proudly proactive and I can go back six or seven years and find the documentation on every hazard identified and what we did to correct that hazard.”

Being able to correctly identify and assess safety hazards and implementing safety features to eliminate the dangers is essential, but George goes further and turns those identified hazards into targeted safety talks that workers can relate to. He says he shares the success stories of how hazards were identified and what steps were taken to alleviate them, and also shares the sadder, unsuccessful safety stories that he culls from the daily media. Both have an impact on workers. Yet he knows that workers can get complacent so there is an added incentive that further rewards them for safe behaviour. Melloul-Blamey offers an annual $500 safety bonus to workers if the company achieves a no-lost-time record throughout the year. In addition, an individual who has gone “above and beyond to develop the safety culture” receives a safety award each year.

While these incentives are the cherry on the sundae, George knows his experience and the added knowledge he has obtained through his Gold Seal certification is helping to keep everyone on a MB job site. “It’s the same as when I was a fire prevention officer, now I just help to save lives on the construction site.”

No accidents, just mistakes

Jonathon Rowe of Sierra Construction in Woodstock is also on a mission. He is determined to eradicate the word “accident” from existence.

“I am a leader and promoter of a paradigm shift to remove the word accident from all documents, conversations and all of society,” says Rowe, the company’s Gold Seal certified safety coordinator. “Instead we substitute other words that reflect the type of incident that occurred. Webster’s dictionary defines ‘accident’ as an unplanned, unforeseen, undesirable or chance event. If we truly believe accidents are preventable then we shouldn’t re-enforce the concept or belief that nothing could have been done to prevent it.”

Rowe continues, “In our conversations and documents at Sierra the word ‘accident’ is not used. In my 20 plus years experience in safety and 31 years as a volunteer firefighter, I know that in every incident there was something that could have been done to prevent it. We as humans make mistakes, but that’s no accident.”

This attitude pervades the Sierra organization from the top down. When Sierra’s president, Cliff Zaluski, asked Rowe to sign up for the Gold Seal Certification course, he was simply ensuring that Rowe, like many of supers and project managers at Sierra were Gold Seal certified.

“It also follows the same core values as our ISO 9001 and 14001 programs with emphasis on continuous improvement,” says Rowe.

After six years with Sierra Construction, Rowe has seen the fruits of his labour and acknowledges it takes time to build a pervasive safety culture. “It’s like eating an elephant. You can’t do it all at once, but by taking one bite at a time, eventually you can do it.”

No matter how big the safety elephant is, both Rowe and George know having their Gold Seal Certification gives them, the workers and their company an added advantage when it comes to working safe and being competitive in the industry.

For more information on Gold Seal Certification for safety coordinators, contact Martha George at mgeorge@gvca.org or log onto www.gvca.org/education.
Experts give us nine suggestions employers can use to improve their health and safety programs right away.

**HOW’S YOUR HEALTH** and safety program? If you’re like many employers, you’ll probably say it’s good enough. Maybe you drafted it yourself, or maybe you paid a consultant a lot of money to put together a good document. In any case, your binder is probably an inch and a half thick, and it’s filled with all kinds of good information—strategic and otherwise—about how to make your sites run as smoothly and safely as possible.

But could you be doing more? You bet you could. Experts say that too often they see cases where employers prepare (or pay for) top-notch health and safety programs, and then fail to implement them properly, or worse, leave the documents sitting on a shelf in an office somewhere. Paul Cyr, a regional health and safety consultant with the Infrastructure Health and Safety Association, says simply completing a health and safety policy, program or plan is never enough. Employers that want to take real value from the time and money they have invested in such documents should know enough to create great implementation and communication strategies—to ensure a program is used the right way on site.

“The construction site is where the rubber hits the road when it comes to health and safety programs,” he says. “Implementing the program is critical, and the job of doing that falls most often to the site superintendent, who sees everything on that site every day.”
Cyr says that one of the best ways to ensure a program is rolled out properly on site is to assign program-related duties to all employees, and to create metrics against which the completion of these duties can be measured.

“For example, keep a record of orientation for every new or reassigned worker. Give every worker a handbook version of the program that he or she can keep handy and refer to at a moment’s notice. For every weekly jobsite inspection, keep detailed inspection forms that list any corrective action required and taken at the site. Do the same for every accident or incident: investigate fully, keep clear documentation, list corrective actions taken and perform follow-up reviews to ensure measures taken are effective. Finally, for every set of minutes you create for your joint health and safety committee meetings, create a companion document that lists action items and confirms they’ve been dealt with.”

Cyr adds that rewarding employees for jobs safely done is a good approach to have, but he suggests that incentives should not necessarily be tied to the absence of loss-time accidents.

“Better to reward employees for diligently performing safety-related activities than to reward for a lack of accidents,” he says. “Such an approach rewards people for continuously applied behaviour, and it helps demonstrate your commitment as an organization to upholding safe work practices.”

Enhancing implementation is just one tip for improving your health and safety program. Here are eight more.

1. **Make it your own.** Off-the-shelf health and safety programs are available just about anywhere on the Internet. IHSA even maintains its own templates to help companies build complete, effective programs. But beware: no one program applies to every employer in every situation. The best programs can begin as templates, but should be refined to address the particular nuances and needs of your company. Obtain a template by all means, but consider it a starting point rather than an end game.

2. **Beware (some) consultants.** It can be just as risky (and significantly more expensive) to recruit a consultant to draft your health and safety program. That’s not to say that all consultants do their jobs poorly. Far from it. But the good ones will take the time to sit down with you and your employees to understand your business before drafting a comprehensive program. So beware the consultant that offers to draft a program without ever setting foot in your office.

3. **Remember that input equals ownership.** Whether you draft a program from scratch, from a template or with the help of a consultant, make sure you include input from all people in your company. Listen to site workers, site supers, project managers and senior managers to find out what does and does not work for each person. Down the road, their input will help ensure their buy-in.

4. **Always give proper care and feeding.** A health and safety program should be a living document. That is, you should always be thinking about ways to improve or amend the document, particularly as your company changes and especially as laws change. It is, of course, a legal requirement to review your program annually, but you might consider doing so quarterly to stay ahead of the game.

5. **Evaluate against tools.** When it comes time to review your program, don’t just give it a quick once over. Put it through the acid test. For example, compare it against the criteria involved in a WSIB WorkWell Audit, or the criteria IHSA uses for its CoR certification. Both are recognized industry benchmarks. If your program can stand up to either or both, then it’s a good one.

6. **Network.** Occupational health and safety professionals seem to always be involved in some meeting or other. Join them. Reach out to your peers to hear what they have to say about their plans, programs and policies. You might learn a thing or two. Share information. Attend conferences. Join committees. Each of these things represents a new forum for deepening your understanding of health and safety laws and practices. Time in is time well spent.

7. **Stay current.** Conventional thinking about health and safety is always changing, so it behooves you to stay current. Keep updated on best practices—not just here in Ontario but in other jurisdictions in the country and around the world. Stay abreast of changing laws—of course—but also track new developments at the Canadian Standards Association. One of the simplest ways you can do this is by signing up to receive email updates from groups such as IHSA, WSIB, GVCA and the Ministry of Labour.

8. **Join a group.** GVCA maintains a Safety Group that has changed the thinking of many member firms such as yours. Even if you think you’re at the top of the heap when it comes to health and safety, you can always learn about new approaches.

For more information on any of these tips, or for advice about creating an effective health and safety program, check out www.ihsa.ca.
It’s been said that your office is about to lead the biggest revitalization of Ontario’s workplace health and safety regime in more than 30 years. How do you aim to do that?

From a legislative point of view, the biggest change is the movement of prevention activities from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) to the Ministry of Labour. One of the major recommendations of the Dean expert review panel was to create an integrated occupational health and safety system. The aim of my office is to create a strategy for health and safety that spans every industry in the province.

Ontario has done very well on health and safety in recent years. Fatalities and injuries are down over the past 10 years. I don’t think anyone would say that our system is broken. But I do think we can all do better, particularly when system partners such as the Ministry of Labour, the WSIB, private trainers and the health and safety associations (HSAs) all work from the same strategy.

The biggest trick, of course, is how to create an integrated service-delivery model. That’s what my office and our partners are doing now. I’m required to deliver a first integrated strategy to the Minister of Labour this fall, and in the past 14 or so months that I’ve been on this job, I’ve been engaging our system partners to arrive at a strategy that works for everyone in Ontario. To be effective, that strategy has to speak to each partner’s needs. It has to be adaptable to the specific conditions of particular markets and industries. It has to be integrated with enforcement. It has to make sense for everyday workers and employers. And it has to yield real metrics that our prevention office can use to identify where to best focus our current and future efforts.

What metrics will you track?

Obviously we’ll use lagging indicators to track what has happened in the past and to help us identify those areas that require particular attention. Having said that, we have to be mindful not to prioritize our work based on past tragedies, particularly at the expense of other activity. That’s why we will also consider leading indicators in our analysis. We want to look at investment intentions to identify the parts of the province that will see the highest surges of activity, and the particular occupations that will be in highest demand. From there, we’ll be able to build a complete picture of where prevention can be best targeted.

What’s your time frame for accomplishing all this?

As I said, I’m required to deliver a first integrated strategy to the Minister of Labour this fall. From there, we’ll proceed with implementation discussions. This isn’t a five- or six-year plan. We want to act as quickly and as efficiently as possible if it means protecting people’s lives.
How have partners responded to your office’s plans for change?

Any time change is discussed, there will always be people who question its need or challenge its application. The trick to getting buy-in from people and organizations is to ensure they see themselves in the end strategy. When someone’s voice is heard and that person is seen to be part of the solution, that person is much more likely to buy into the process. To that end, I’ve been meeting regularly with the CEOs of the HSAs to talk about the strategy and to hear their views. I’ll continue to work with them until we arrive at a strategy that they all support.

Give us an update on the progress your office has made with regard to implementing the recommendations of the Dean report.

In terms of real, tangible efforts, we developed a poster on prevention that all workplaces must display in their offices beginning October 1. We’ve created two mandatory safety-training programs—one for workers, the other for supervisors—that talk about workers’ rights and responsibilities. The worker-specific program has been pilot tested and will be distributed province wide soon. The supervisor program will be piloted this fall. We’re also developing standards for training programs for high-hazard occupations.

Now that our office is up and running at full capacity, we’re moving rapidly on many more recommendations. Plus we’re working on a lot of behind-the-scenes initiatives—such as a stakeholder-engagement strategy, gap analyses and performance metrics—that will form the groundwork for future progress.

Talk to us about the specific work of your new Prevention Council.

The council is made up of prevention leaders who are there to advise me, as everyone knows. This group will be the key stakeholder table from me, but they will also engage regularly with their communities. In fact, I’m working with them right now to create an external engagement strategy.

Construction employer groups are concerned that so far none of the nine named council members are from this industry. Will either of the two to-be-named members come from construction?

I’ll be frank: when 11 people sit around a table, there’s no way they all can represent every industry. The goal of these people is to consider the needs and interests of the entire economy. If there’s a specific industry, such as construction, that isn’t represented right now, it won’t be ignored. If it were, this group wouldn’t be doing its job.

Construction’s interests are top of mind for this council and will always be addressed. The role of these 11 people is to demonstrate success by connecting not just with the industries they serve every day, but also with those they don’t normally visit.

What is the future of the Safety Groups, particularly as COR is becoming more prominent in Ontario?

Within the context of developing an integrated strategy, my office will review all prevention incentive programs, such as Workwell, Safety Groups and the Safe Communities Incentive Program. We want to identify those that are valuable to Ontarians and that meet new standards for prevention that this office will develop.

I’m not here to endorse one program over the other. But I do want this office to create standards to guide the development or improvement of programs like Safety Groups and COR. And I do want to tie all these programs together in a way that makes sense for employers.

The aim of your office is to help Ontario do better as it pertains to safety. After your first year on the job, are we doing better?

First, let me say that my aim isn’t to re-invent this province’s health and safety system. It’s good. It works. My aim is to make everything better. It’s not a case of starting afresh. It’s an iterative process where we build on successes and always aim to improve.

It’s early days still in my mandate, so whether we’re doing better is a relative notion. I will say that we’re doing better at bringing more stakeholders to the table than ever before. I’m talking about people who never were inclined to participate in such exercises in the past. They’re participating and that’s an important improvement. The more people who have their oars in the water, so to speak, the faster we can achieve our goal and make even more meaningful improvements.
Five ways to help ensure a routine WSIB claim stays routine

Imagine for a moment

that the worst has happened. You’ve just gotten off the phone with your site supervisor who has advised you there’s been an accident on site. A worker is hurt and will probably miss time as a result. Fortunately, the worker is on his way to hospital for medical attention, but it’s clear that your company will have to make a claim to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) for compensation. What do you do?

John Russell is a certified specialist in Workplace Safety and Insurance Law. He’s seen countless cases of workplace injuries and has advised as many employers about ways to handle claims effectively and efficiently to ensure that a routine claim doesn’t spiral out of control and morph into a costly, persistent nightmare.

“The time to start thinking about your claims management processes isn’t when an incident has just occurred on site,” he says. “It’s now. Make sure you have a clear plan in place for responding to an accident, ensuring that your worker has safe access to health care, and reporting the circumstances of the claim to the WSIB. And make sure everyone on site knows these steps well enough to be able to follow them in the event an injury is reported.”

Here are five steps Russell recommends every employer follows at a minimum to help ensure a routine WSIB claim stays routine.
**FIRST**, build an accident reporting policy. It goes without saying that any work-related accident or illness must be reported to the WSIB in short order, but the actual process of documenting an accident or illness is critical. Such detail will certainly be required when you go to complete the WSIB’s Form 7 and may be essential should the claim be appealed at a later stage.

Russell advises that all employers draft accident reporting policies that require all injuries—serious or otherwise, and even near misses—be reported immediately to a foreman or site supervisor. The policy should require that event data such as date, time, circumstances, weather conditions and names of witnesses be logged to help identify the cause of the occurrence.

To ensure that the accident reporting policy is available and accessible to staff, build it into your occupational health and safety policy. Review it in orientation and safety meetings and ensure site workers sign off confirming they have read and understood the protocol.

**SECOND**, offer to transport the worker to a health care practitioner. This step may also seem obvious, but it bears explanation. As an employer, you are legally obligated to offer to transport an injured worker to seek health care should the worker want or need medical attention.

At this time, you can reassure the worker that suitable work is immediately available to them, at no wage loss.

It’s essential that you provide the worker with a copy of the WSIB’s new Form 8, the Health Professional’s Report, for completion by the attending health care practitioner. Ensure page 2 of the document is returned to you, to help with returning the worker to suitable work.

**THIRD**, conduct an accident investigation. Once the worker has been properly attended to, your job is to gather all of the details surrounding the incident. Talk to any witnesses and get detailed, signed statements from each of them. Don’t put words in their mouths. Act as objectively as possible and ask workers to provide statements in their own words, and in their own writing.

Get as much detail as possible about the event. List equipment, materials and weights in use at the time of the accident to ensure you obtain as complete a picture of the occurrence as possible.

**FOURTH**, complete the Form 7, the Employer’s Report of Injury/Disease. This is your version of the events which the WSIB will consider in adjudicating the claim. It is therefore critical that the form be carefully completed and signed within three calendar days of your learning of the accident, and then filed with the WSIB.

**FINALLY**, proceed with return to work arrangements as soon as possible. Your goal, says Russell, should be to bring the worker back to at least modified duties as soon as possible after the worker seeks health care. If that is not possible, target the earliest possible date. At all times, be as flexible and accommodating as possible to the worker and his or her circumstances, and above all, keep WSIB in the loop. Update them on all activities and especially advise of any difficulties you encounter.

Under the claims section of its website, the WSIB offers a detailed guide to completing a Form 7. Follow these steps closely to ensure the form is completed fully. The board will charge penalties of $250 to employers for late or incomplete forms as well as for failing to provide a copy of the Form 7 to the worker. As well, the board will stack penalties, meaning that it will charge $500 for a late-delivered, incomplete form.

**FAIL TO PLAN? PLAN TO FAIL.**

Dealing with WSIB claims can be daunting, but most can be simplified and made routine by planning ahead and adopting a few basic processes. The alternative—reacting to a WSIB claim as it occurs—is fraught with challenges and can drive claims and associated costs out of control in no time at all.
WSIB raises 2013 premiums by 2.5%

Although employers may grumble about the additional cost of doing business, industry experts believe that the WSIB may finally be on track to getting its fiscal house in order.

IT DIDN’T COME as a surprise to many, but that didn’t make the pill any easier to swallow.

At the end of October, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) announced its schedule of employer premiums for 2013. Across the board, premiums increased by 2.5 percent—a total many industry experts expected. The maximum insurable earnings ceiling also rose, from $81,700 to $83,200.

“Nobody likes to see an increase in their WSIB costs, so nobody is thrilled with the board’s announcement,” says Ian Cunningham, president of the Council of Ontario Construction Associations. “Having said that and in the wake of the Arthurs Report, it’s a relief to see that premium rates didn’t increase by more. So in that sense, 2.5 percent is manageable.”

Despite the poor news for employers, the WSIB says it is making progress in eliminating its operating deficit, which exceeds $14 billion. 2011 marked the first year in a decade in which the board achieved an operating surplus. The board credits recent operational changes and a renewed emphasis on financial discipline as having contributed to such progress. The decision to raise all employer premiums again in 2013 is expected to further help the board meet its fiscal goals.

“Our board made this decision based on sound and detailed actuarial and financial analysis. It will enable the WSIB to meet the government’s requirement that the WSIB be 60 percent funded by 2017,” said WSIB chair Elizabeth Witmer. “Although this premium rate increase may add costs today, the retirement of the unfunded liability will result in lower premiums and strengthened competitiveness for Ontario businesses in the longer term.”

As far as Cunningham is concerned, the WSIB board is on the right track.

“In think the changes and strategic direction the board’s senior management group has taken shows that the WSIB is headed in the right direction,” he said. “I believe the group has been given the ability to go forward with minimal political interference, and I am hopeful that Ontario is on course to achieve a sustainable workplace compensation system.”

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* Indicates a new rate group for 2013
Preserving your company’s reputation during a crisis

A crisis-communications plan can help your company not only respond in efficient manner to a workplace accident, but also emerge with its business reputation intact—or even enhanced.
**IMAGINE, FOR A MOMENT,** that the unthinkable has happened on your busy downtown job site. A tower crane has collapsed, killing three workers. Debris has crashed into an adjacent, occupied office tower. Emergency teams are en route. In all likelihood, so too are the media. Work on site has screeched to a halt and chaos ensues on the site as people are trying to get themselves out of harm’s way. A full-blown crisis of the strictest definition of the word is quite clearly in progress on your job site.

Dire as this situation sounds, it serves to underscore a point: construction is a dangerous business. We all know that in the blink of an eye, everyday operations can be thrown into turmoil by a site accident. Although learning how to manage a crisis won’t undo the harm caused to injured victims, damaged property or a contaminated environment, such a skill can help your company take control of the situation and minimize further harm to victims and their families, and also to your business’s good name.

Put another way, failing to plan an appropriate crisis response is a sure-fire way to making a difficult situation even more complex.

**You can’t prepare for a crisis while you’re having one**

Steve Gray of Rockford Gray LLP is a former TV reporter. Based out of Denver, Colorado, he and his colleagues specialize in delivering specialized media training—including crisis-management training—to companies from all different industries all across North America. The company’s mantra is contained in the subhead above: you simply cannot prepare for a crisis while one is in progress.

“In any crisis—a construction site accident included—there are so many moving parts at play that reacting to events as they unfold is a recipe for failure,” says Gray. “The reality is that public perception of you as a company leader and of your business will be put under intense scrutiny during a crisis. How you respond and react to the situation, the victims, the media, even the emergency responders is judged in the public eye. Wrong decisions and offhand remarks can destroy a company’s reputation. Conversely, a helpful attitude and a few empathetic statements can demonstrate real leadership. The difference between the two outcomes is a carefully crafted and properly executed crisis communications plan.”

**In case of emergency...**

Of course, it’s impossible to tailor a crisis communications plan for all situations. There are, however, a few basic components that are common to all plans. These can buy valuable time to help you and your team investigate the root causes of the incident and think through event-specific occurrences that require more tactical responses. The notion here isn’t to create an all-encompassing document, but to build a strategy that can be pulled off the shelf and put into action at a moment’s notice.

When planning a crisis response, one of the first things to do is to assemble a crisis-response team. In a construction company, such a group might include the company president, the head of communications, the safety manager, the head of any affected departments, and company lawyers. Among those people, appoint one person as the official spokesperson for a crisis. Naming such a person, and equipping him or her with training required to deal with media and the public, is critical. Your spokesperson has to be knowledgeable not only about the crisis but also about the company itself so that he or she can speak convincingly and authoritatively about the event.

Some experts suggest your spokesperson should be your company president. Gray disagrees.

“During a crisis, a company president is going to have a lot of associated problems to manage,” he says. “He or she is going to have to ensure the business keeps running, and deal with the project owner and the presidents of the subtrades and consultants on the job. The president will be stretched in a dozen different directions, so he or she is not always the best person to play the role of spokesperson.”

Gray adds that a key element of crisis planning is ensuring that everyone in the company knows who the official spokesperson is for any crisis, that way they can refer requests for information to the spokesperson for official comment.

“Because of the nature of their businesses, most construction companies do a good job of addressing operational needs when an accident occurs,” says Gray. “They know that the first priority is to limit, control or end the problem, then react to deploy people and resources to where they’re needed most, and facilitate access to their sites by emergency services. Where construction companies fail is around communicating messages to media, fellow employees, victims and victims’ families. These groups need to be dealt with in a timely, sensitive and transparent manner.”
Going public: be there first

One of the hard and fast rules of responding publicly to a crisis is to tell as much information as possible as quickly as possible. Admit negative information openly, apologize sincerely and express empathy for victims sincerely. It’s far better for your company to offer negative information honestly than it is for your critics to issue damaging indictments.

Having said that, experts agree that acting too hastily can be just as detrimental as dodging blame. One of the rules of thumb that Gray and his colleagues advise is for companies to create a “buy-time” statement. Composed simply, the buy-time statement should be the opening address delivered to the media and the public by the spokesperson. It acknowledges that an incident has occurred on site, that the team is currently looking into what has happened, but at this time, no one has enough factual information at hand to answer any questions. In the statement, the spokesperson should also promise to return to the media for more detailed comment when he or she has been able to gather the necessary facts.

When responding to a crisis, a callous “no comment” statement is potentially dangerous. It suggests to anyone listening not only that you don’t know what’s going on but also that you’re also unwilling to face responsibility for the incident. Moreover it creates a roadblock between the incident and the public and, in so doing, draws even more unwanted attention to the event.

Gather the facts, report the incident

The next step of your crisis response plan is to gather facts and release them in a controlled fashion. Official public statements should continue to go through the spokesperson, but your company should also be communicating through its website, its media releases and social media.

“Social media today has changed the practice of crisis response dramatically,” says Gray. “Everyone with a smartphone is now potentially a reporter. Your company needs to keep control of social media use during a crisis to ensure messaging remains consistent. We often advise companies to introduce policies and procedures that require all workers to stop using social media—and here I mean not just Facebook and Twitter, but also text and emails—the instant a crisis happens.”

More than this, Gray says your company should be using its own social media presence to monitor responses to the crisis and respond accordingly.

“A lot of construction companies have yet to adopt social media as business tools, but the reality of the situation is that anyone in business today has a presence on social media,” says Gray. “Whether you know it—or like it—or not, people with social media accounts could be posting about your business this very moment. And they will undoubtedly do so during a crisis. So don’t bury your head in the sand. Act and respond.”

At a minimum, Gray advises that companies should have social media accounts only to monitor what’s being said about them on the Internet. Whether you choose to respond to comments via social media is another matter entirely.

It’s all about being proactive

No strategy can completely relieve the harm caused by a crisis. In every case, victims suffer and costs are incurred. Having said that, there are ways to reduce the damage caused by a crisis on your company’s reputation. A well thought-out and practices crisis communications plan can help your company react successfully and thoughtfully to a difficult event and, with any luck, emerge on the other side of the occurrence with heads held high.
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A remarkable city, a remarkable experience

GVCA members visited Berlin in October and experienced a special tour of some of the city's most architecturally stunning buildings.

This fall, a handful of GVCA members enjoyed a one-of-a-kind architectural tour of one of the world's most remarkable capital cities. During their visit to Berlin, members were treated to sightseeing of not only historic sights but also modern architectural masterpieces.

GVCA president Martha George says one of her trip highlights was the Frank Gehry-designed DZ Bank building, located immediately across the street from the Brandenburg Gate. Local laws stipulate that no building in the vicinity of the 18th century gate may feature an exterior that is more elaborate than the gate itself. The outside of the building, therefore, is relatively non-descript. Inside, however, Gehry spared no inspiration. The architect used all manner of materials and shapes to create signature atria, conference rooms, office spaces, shops and residences.

George says that Berlin was an obvious choice for the association’s first educational tour. Re-constructed during the immediate post-war era, Berlin features a mix of historical buildings whose origins date back hundreds of years standing side by side with thoroughly modern re-built structures. The result might appear incongruous, but the experience is anything but.

“During the post-war era, Berlin invited architects from all across Europe to lead renovation projects,” says George. “Today, the city suggests a mix of architectural styles that appear very different—and which nonetheless still acknowledge the history of the war—and which work with each other perfectly. It’s mind-boggling to see these rebuilt structures. They look like they have been there forever.”

Other highlights of the trip include: a tour of the Canadian embassy and an opportunity to visit with Peter Boehm, Canada’s ambassador to Germany and a Wilfrid Laurier University graduate; a visit to Checkpoint Charlie, the original border crossing for the Allies; a lunch at the public roof garden restaurant in the Reichstag; a trip to Museum Island, a UNESCO World Heritage site located in the river Spree, and which is home to a collection of important museums; and an exclusive tour of the Concorde Hotel, followed by a private lunch with the hotel’s prizewinning architect, Prof. Jan Kleihues.

“We were all in awe of everything we saw in Berlin,” said George. “It was striking. Everything we saw and did exceeded my expectations.”

George says she’s got plans for a follow-up architectural tour in the year ahead. Although she won’t tip her cap at the moment, she has hinted the destination will be closer to home, yet nonetheless impressive.
This September dozens of kids from Waterloo Region received new backpacks filled with quality school supplies because the Women in Construction and the companies they work for chose to make a difference.

The third annual Backpacks for Success drive saw the GVCA membership come together and help out kids who do not have the economic advantages that other kids may have. The backpacks came in various grade/gender collections so that a 15-year-old boy and a 7-year-old girl would have the appropriate school supplies for their grade.

Thank you to the participating GVCA members:

- ACL Steel Ltd.
- Action Home Improvements Inc.
- Angela Pause, W4R Marketing
- Barb Flagel - GVCA
- Cowan Insurance
- Deloitte
- Frey Building Contractors
- Greystone Design Group Inc.
- Harold Stecho Electric Limited
- L.J. Barton Mechanical
- Laura Benedict - GVCA
- Martha George - GVCA
- Melloul-Blamey Construction Inc.
- Priority Mechanical Services Ltd.
- Process Group Inc.
- Sarah Whittaker - GVCA
- Staples Advantage (Business Interiors by Staples)
- The Hansen Home
- Winmar

Women in Construction have a pajama party (for kids in need!)

The Women in Construction (WinC) threw a pajama party in November. No, they didn’t wear them. They bought 55 pairs of new pajamas for children and youth who live in disadvantaged homes in low-income neighbourhoods. The annual Christmas pajama drive culminated in a fun evening out for the Holiday Sparkler dinner held at The Charcoal Steakhouse on November 27. This year 71 women gathered together to laugh, eat great food and network, making it another sold out WinC event.

The WinC chapter of the GVCA features four events a year including an all-woman golf tournament in August. Any woman who is part of the construction industry, and whose company is a GVCA member, can join Women in Construction and participate in these events. Members are also encouraged to bring along non-members as guests.

For more information about WinC, visit www.gvca.org/about_gvca/d/213.html.
If you’re aged 40 or younger, if you work—in any capacity—for one of the GVCA’s member firms and if you’ve got a strong desire to grow your skills base and personal networks, then GVCA’s Leaders in Construction (LinC) group just might be the thing for you.

Founded in the fall of 2012, the LinC group is a forum for the next generation of construction industry leaders to establish themselves and grow their talents. Through education sessions, social events, community activities and networking opportunities, members connect with one another, develop their professional skills, mentor peers and exchange ideas, interests and best practices.

Already, 95 people have joined the LinC group, and we’re always on the lookout for new members!

LinC has two events planned for the early new year. On January 9 at the GVCA offices, the group will host its first Coffee Connection seminar: How to Read Financial Statements. There, members will be taught the basics of how to read common financial statements—including income statements, balance sheets and statements of cash flows—and will be shown which numbers and ratios are of interest to shareholders, stakeholders and lenders.

Future Coffee Connection topics include: business valuation for the buyer’s side, funding and incentives for construction companies, and technology trends.

On January 25, GVCA LinC members will go head to head with members of the LDCA at the Woodstock Curling club for a Curling Bonspiel. The cost to register is $50.

See the GVCA LinC website: www.gvca.org/about_gvca/d/linc.html for registration information and details about these and other events.
GVCA social calendar
Winter/Spring 2013

January 24
Detroit Auto Show

January 25
LinC Curling Bonspiel GVCA & LDCA

January
Safety Group Meeting

February
Safety Group Meeting

February 19
Annual General Meeting
Business Heritage Awards
Hall of Fame Induction

February 27
Ski Day

February 15
LinC Hockey Night

March
Safety Group Meeting

April
Safety Group Meeting

April 26
BE Education Symposium

May
Women in Construction event

June 20
Annual Golf Tournament

GVCA education calendar,
Winter/Spring 2013

December 19
GOLD SEAL – Microsoft Excel (Novice)
Safety Group Lite Program begins

January 9
LinC Coffee Connection Seminar:
How to Read Financial Statements

January 16
Professional Ethics in Construction

January 29 & 31
Standard First Aid Level C with CPR & AED

January 22
Occupational Health and Safety Act Training

January 22 – April 16
GOLD SEAL - Introduction to Cost Estimating

January 24
GOLD SEAL - Human Resources Overview:
Steering the Organization Away from Trouble

February
GOLD SEAL - Construction 101

February
WHMIS Training

February
Succession Planning Workshop

March
Basics of Supervising – Home Study

March
GOLD SEAL - Microsoft Project for Construction
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