

5,000 Firm Workplace Prevention Study – November 2010

One of the largest workplace prevention studies ever undertaken in Ontario is underway. PSHSA and its Health and Safety Ontario partners (www.healthandsafetyontario.ca) are joining forces with the Institute for Work & Health (IWH), a research organization, to recruit 5,000 organizations to participate.

The “5,000 Firm Study,” as it’s informally known, is focused on understanding how organizations’ health, safety and disability policies and practices are related to injuries and illness. The scope is huge, including every major sector in Ontario. More than 5,000 firms will be randomly selected from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board’s (WSIB’s) database. Public service agencies from the municipal, health care and education sectors will be contacted by PSHSA and invited to participate in the coming months.

“This is a groundbreaking project, which could potentially have huge implications for Ontario’s prevention system, and beyond,” says Dr. Ben Amick, IWH’s scientific director and the project lead. “A project of this magnitude is only possible with the strong commitment to safety and support for research across Ontario’s prevention system.”

After agreeing to participate, organizations will be asked to fill out a web-based questionnaire, with questions about their safety culture, occupational health and safety management systems, joint health and safety committees, and organizational policies and practices. This survey will help to identify “leading organizational indicators.” A leading indicator provides a sense of an organization’s ongoing health and safety initiatives, and the potential for injuries or illnesses before they occur.

Each firm’s responses about its management or organizational safety measures will be linked to its claim rate records – with all information being maintained in strict confidence by IWH. By making this linkage, the researchers will be able to see if there are relationships between specific measures, and injury or illness claims.

“The whole idea of looking at leading indicators is so important,” says Dr. Kathryn Nichol, a program specialist with PSHSA. “Including every sector in this initial gathering of information is essential, as it allows the relationship findings between leading indicators and claims to be applied to all sectors.

At the end, the goal is to have a set of the most accurate leading indicators that all workplaces can use to assess their safety performance. “While this will benefit all sectors, health care is an industry identified to have a high risk of injury and one that faces a multitude of challenges even with the best programs, people and leadership support,” says Nichol. “This tool provides another opportunity to reduce injury and illness using practices that are based on evidence.”

In addition, she notes that the study findings will help the PSHSA and other system partners to identify and develop future products, services or innovations for their clients.

Each participating organization will receive a report showing how it compares with other organizations in its sector. Collectively, the information will create a huge knowledge base for Ontario, which can be used as a benchmark by any organization.

For more information about this study, please contact Colette Severin, the project coordinator at IWH, at cseverin@iwh.on.ca or 416 927-2027 ext. 2126. The contact at PSHSA is Dr. Kathryn Nichol, Program Specialist at 416-698-5644 or 1-877-924-3444 or knichol@pshsa.ca