

Protecting People: Your Most Valuable Asset, **Association**, February - March 2007

Most association executives are bound by Board policy to provide a safe and healthy workplace for staff and volunteers. But, we live in a busy world, and we may become focused on our services and our products to the extent that workplace safety can be forgotten. There are three risk areas that are probably significant for your association staff and volunteers – in the car, in the office, and out in the world.

Association executives and staff are always on the go. We visit clients and members, we attend conferences and shows, we drive to the office and return home – our car is our office on wheels. All of which begs the following questions:

1. Do you have policies requiring vehicles to be road-worthy?
2. Do you require safety checks for vehicles?
3. Do you check driver's abstracts with your Ministry of Transportation?
4. Do you have any staff policies on driving – e.g. driving and using cell phones?
5. Do you send staff to full day meetings, and then expect them to drive for hours to get home?
6. Do you encourage staff to jam the maximum number of meetings into a day, leading to driving too fast, taking chances and driving while stressed?
7. Have you ever sent staff on Defensive Driving courses, or to "Skid School"?

The list of questions above can serve as a starting point to define your association's approach to the risks your staff and volunteers face on the road. In the office, we often store files, boxes of receipts and documents, products for shipment and, just lots and lots of "stuff". The first step is the simplest – if you don't need it, toss it. Once you have eliminated what you can, remember the following:

1. Store heavy items lower, light items higher.
2. Label boxes so you don't have to lift and open to see what is inside.
3. Don't overload shelves, and don't let boxes overhang the edges.
4. Get a proper step stool or step ladder – don't climb the shelves or stand on boxes.
5. Light storage areas adequately – you need to see the labels and walk without tripping.
6. Limit box content so that the smallest person in the office can lift it comfortably without help.
7. Make a rule – and lead by example - heavy items (show displays, boxes of product, etc.) are not moved by one person.

Dwight Barratt Associates Inc.

As associations, we send our staff and volunteers out into the world everyday, to visit clients, to meet with those who use our products and services, and to represent us. Often, they travel alone, and in many cases, they travel in vehicles loaded with product samples and electronic equipment. Meetings can be at night, and some associations provide services in private homes. In many sectors a high proportion of staff and volunteers are women.

As a starting point, consider the following risk factors:

1. Do you handle money?
2. Do you work or travel alone?
3. Do you transport valuable goods or equipment?
4. Do you deliver messages that are controversial or aggravating?
5. Do you visit private homes, or meet in isolated workplaces?
6. Does your clientele have a high potential for violent or aggressive behaviour?
7. Do you close the office alone, at night, or when no one else is around (weekends, etc.)?

Consider shipping products to a conference, working in pairs when traveling to isolated workplaces, not allowing one person to work alone in the office – these are common sense responses to real concerns.

Associations are successful because of our people. Our people drive, they work in our offices, and they meet clients and the public, and in each of these areas there are steps we can take to minimize the risk and keep them safe.

Bottom line: association staff and volunteers deserve safe workplaces.