Lessons Learned

by Alan Hinsey

When Governor King appointed me as director of the Bureau of Labor Standards (BLS) in 1995, I couldn't even spell "OSHA," let alone fully understand the significant workplace safety and health issues facing Maine workers and employers. I have been fortunate to work with some of the brightest and most dedicated professionals in the field of workplace safety and health over the last five years, and they taught me a great deal about the issues and policy implications. Here are four important lessons I learned:

1. Employers want to do the right thing: Most of the over 40,000 employers in Maine try hard to comply with the laws and to improve the working conditions for their employees. These employers care about their employees; they know their employees are their most valuable asset.

Providing safe working conditions is not only the right thing to do for workers, it also makes good business sense. Safe workplaces are efficient workplaces, and efficient workplaces make money.

2. Workers want to do a good job: Most of the 600,000 workers in Maine are hard working people who want to do a good job; after all, the "Maine work ethic" is legendary throughout the country. But even eager and dedicated workers need to be reminded that working safely is good for them and the company. Employers must lead by example - It is critical that employers remind workers that reporting hazards, accidents and injuries is a sign of a good employee.

3. I have seen the Enemy— and it is Complacency: Even though workers' compensation costs and workplace injuries are lower now than a decade ago, we must remain vigilant. The number of lost time claims and the number of workplace deaths have increased slightly in each of the past two years. These numbers are not just lines on a chart - they represent our workers, our family members, our friends, our neighbors. There's still a lot to do.

"While I am excited about reentering the private sector, I have mixed emotions about leaving BLS."

4. It's not "Bottom Up" or "Top Down" — It's "From the Center Out": We all want safer organizations, but the trick is finding the best formula to get us there. Many people believe that if top management is not committed to safety, it will not happen. Others believe that a bottom-up approach made up of empowered safety teams is essential to success. Commitment of top management is certainly important, and so is the involvement of staff at all levels of the organization. But a truly safety conscious workplace is one that has safety and health is a core value. Safety must be part of the basic culture, evident in all the organization says and does. That's a tough challenge for any organization, and one that must be approached on a

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case by case basis. Each organization must reach deeply into its own structure to firmly implant safety as a core value. I always recommend that organizations get all the help they can to achieve this goal. The "SafetyWorks!" Consultants at MDOL can provide really good assistance - give them a call (1-877-SAFE-345).

These are just a few of the many lessons I learned while I had the honor of leading the Bureau of Labor Standards. The final lesson I learned at BLS is a difficult one — it's hard to leave good people. While I am excited about re-entering the private sector, I have mixed emotions about leaving BLS. I will miss my colleagues at BLS, but I will try to honor them all by using the lessons I learned from them (and from all of you) in my daily life as a worker, an employer and a private citizen.

(Note: Alan Hinsey stepped down on July 15, 2000 to return to work in the private sector from his position as director of the Bureau of Labor Standards.)

Did you know?...

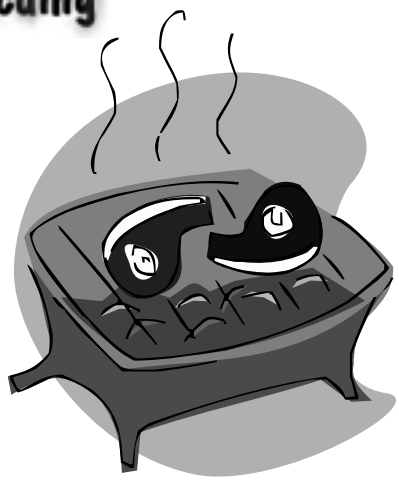
Sitting Can be Hazardous to your Health!

Sitting for long periods of time in an awkward position puts stress on your joints and tendons and pressure on the disks in your back. To avoid health problems from sitting:

- ✔ Sit less
- ✔ Move around more (standing in place doesn't help)
- ✔ Arrange your job so you can work in a variety of comfortable seated positions.

Tips for Barbecuing

If you use a wire brush to clean your barbecue grill, small pieces of wire can stick to the grill and work their way into your burgers. If you must use a wire brush, wipe the grill with a paper towel, then inspect it before you cook. Better yet, don't use a wire brush at all; try a paint scraper or cover the grill with extra heavy duty aluminum foil.



Remember, safety works at home and on the job!

New classes from SafetyWorks!

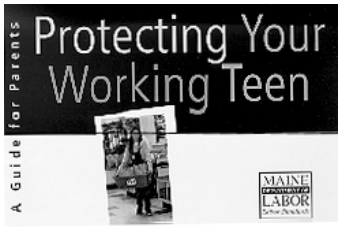
If you received this newsletter in the mail, you'll soon find our new schedule of free classes in your mailbox. We've added two new courses this fall, one on assessing ergonomic hazards and another on how to write safety programs. We developed both new classes from your suggestions.

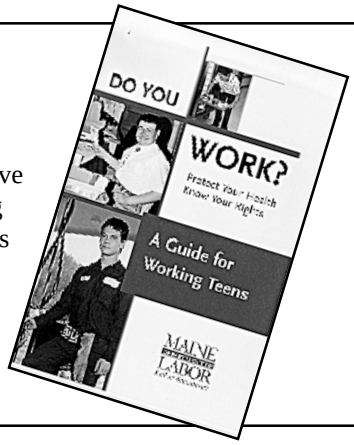
If you need a schedule, call us at 1-877-SAFE-345, or visit our website.*

Don't forget—classes fill quickly, so register soon.

Keeping Teen Workers Safe

Because of the tight labor market, Maine employers are hiring more young people this summer. Teens are more likely to be injured at work than adults because they lack experience and training. Two SafetyWorks! booklets give teens and parents information about the rights of young workers and how to stay safe on the job. For free copies of the booklets ***Do You Work? A Guide for Working Teens*** **and** ***Protect Your Working Teen: A Guide for Parents,*** **call SafetyWorks! at 1-877-SAFE-345.** You can view and download *Do you Work?* from the SafetyWorks! website.*





***Visit our website at http://janus@state.me.us/labor/blsmain.htm**

Notes from the Field

The Workers' Page, a new feature of OSHA's website www.osha.gov, includes information on how to file a complaint with OSHA, rights and responsibilities of employers and employees, workplace problems, and resources.

The most common enforcement issues arising from OSHA inspections involve the following standards:

General Industry
Lockout / Tagout - 29 CFR 1910.147
Electrical - 29 CFR 1910.305
Hazardous Communications - 29 CFR 1910.1200
Machine Guarding - 29 CFR 1910.272

Construction
Scaffolding - 29 CFR 1926.451
Fall Protection - 29 CFR 1926.501
Excavation - 29 CFR 1926.651
Hazardous Communications - 29 CFR 1910.1200
Ladders - 29 CFR 1926.1053

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Maine Safety and Health Conference

September 26-29,2000

Bangor, Maine

For information call Maine Safety Council at 854-8441.

Safety Certificates Awarded

Three students at Penobscot Jobs Corp Center in Bangor received Certificates of Accomplishment under the Maine Department of Labor, Safety Certificate Program. All three completed extensive workplace safety coursework and passed written and performance exams to earn the certificates.

From left: Penobscot Jobs Corp Instructor Fred Schmidt and Safety Certificate awardees Joseph Bean, Earle Rice and William Badge.

Articles for **SafetyWorks!** are written by individual authors and are not necessarily products of the Bureau of Labor Standards (BLS) or its editors. Information contained in the articles should not be seen as a substitute for policy or for regulations.

The editors are Lynne Lamstein, director of outreach and education and Jonathan Lepoff, staff development coordinator. You may reach them by calling 624-6400. For more information about SafetyWorks!, use our toll-free number: **1-877-SAFE-345.** TTY 1-800-794-1110. e-mail: webmaster_bls@state.me.us

Carbon Monoxide Poster Contest Winners

To help spread the word about the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning, SafetyWorks! and the Bureau of Health sponsored a poster contest for high school art students. Two Thornton Academy students, Elizabeth Caron and Jon Souliere, earned the top awards. To view and print their posters, visit our website.*

Governor Angus King and Thornton Academy student Jon Souliere display the prize-winning posters at an award ceremony at the Blaine House.

"What do you mean, how much?"

***Visit our website at http://janus@state.me.us/labor/blsmain.htm**

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Summer 2000

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Not "Goodbye" - but rather, "See you later"

As I step down as director, I want to say that it has been an honor and a privilege to work with and get to know, so many occupational safety and health professionals. I appreciate all that you have taught me, and for the noble work that you do day in and day out - I tip my hat.

Finally, I wanted to say thank you to the staff at the Bureau of Labor Standards, who are among the unsung heroes in this state. It is a small bureau, only 55 staff, but its responsibility, influence and impact are indeed felt statewide.

One of the sayings we have at BLS is "Every Employee, Every Employer, Every Year," which reminds us that we virtually touch the lives of every worker and every workplace in the State - every year. The staff at BLS are truly dedicated to changing the workplace culture in Maine.

It will be hard to leave this great staff and to leave all of the friends and colleagues I have come to value over the past five years. So, instead of "Goodbye," I'll simply say "See you later." I'm sure our paths will cross again.

And hey ..... let's be careful out there.

Alan C. Hinsey, Director
Bureau of Labor Standards