

Case Study

Healthy Workplace Programs at
Irving Paper Ltd.
Saint John, New Brunswick

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Introduction

This case study is one of a series of twelve such studies conducted by the Canadian Labour and Business Centre during 2001 – 2002.

Issues of workplace health and wellness are an ongoing priority for the Centre, which is a joint organization founded on strong membership from the main workplace parties – business and labour. We believe that approaches which promote workplace health and wellness are in the best interests of both employers and workers – a clear ‘win-win’. In particular, in a period of anticipated growing skill shortages, those employers who pay attention to workplace health issues will have a competitive advantage over others in recruiting and retaining workers with much-needed skills.

The following case study reflects the Centre’s main objective in undertaking this work, namely:

- To identify the key features of the wellness initiatives in each workplace;
- To document the role of both management and unions/workers in managing these initiatives;
- To assess the relationship between the initiatives and the organization’s business strategy and ‘culture’; and
- To document the ways in which the workplace monitors the impacts of its health/wellness activities.

In short, the case studies are as much about the *process* of workplace wellness as about the *content* and *impacts* of individual workplaces’ initiatives.

Taken as a group, the full set of cases has been deliberately assembled to reflect, as widely as possible, a broad diversity of workplaces in terms of geography, sector, size, and union/non-union status. As a group, the cases are intended to tap the experience and practice of a variety of workplaces, in order to maximize the benefit from the case study work. Readers will note, as a result, that no two cases are alike, and that the lessons to be learned from each case vary considerably.

The full set of case studies will be available on the Centre’s website at www.clbc.ca, where they will be published individually. The Centre is also preparing a summary commentary on the cases, which will identify key common features – and important differences – among them. Finally, the Centre is developing a series of regional seminars at which some of the workplaces featured in these case studies will share their experiences. As they are scheduled, the seminars will also be listed on the CLBC website.

The Canadian Labour and Business Centre welcomes readers’ comments and questions, which may be communicated to the Centre at (613) 234-0505, or to info@clbc.ca

Irving Paper Case Study Summary

- *Irving Paper is a leading producer of newsprint and specialty papers. Located in Saint John, New Brunswick, its 280 hourly employees are represented by the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada.*
- *The company views safety, health and wellness programs as “preventative maintenance for employees”, and a key part of its business strategy and success.*
- *The company has a formal wellness policy statement and an on-site Health Services Department. Wellness programs include smoking cessation, nutrition and fitness.*
- *Irving Paper’s approach relies upon a well developed structure of joint labour-management committees and is characterized by frequent two-way communication.*
- *Managers and employees believe that healthy workplace initiatives have contributed to increased safety, reduced short-term disability claims costs, increased job satisfaction and vastly improved labour-management relations.*

I. The Company

Irving Paper is a family owned business specializing in the production of newsprint and specialty papers. Based in Saint John, New Brunswick, the organization employs 368 people. Hourly workers are represented by the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada.

Irving Paper operates in a highly competitive and worldwide market, with about 75 per cent of its sales to the United States’ Eastern seaboard, and the remainder to Canada, the Caribbean, and the U.K. The Saint John mill, built in 1964 and purchased by J.D. Irving Ltd. in 1981, has become one of the most advanced pulp and paper mills in North America. Since the purchase of the mill by Irving, there have been significant technical upgrades, including a \$100 million investment in 1991 to upgrade its Thermo-mechanical pulp (TMP) system, as well as paper machines and mill infrastructure. The mill’s production is now an integrated and highly automated process, and is controlled by sophisticated touch-screen computers from a centralized control room. The mill also utilizes the latest in calendaring and wrapping technologies. Irving Paper prides itself on its state of the art and cutting edge technologies. In 1999, another \$100 million upgrade was made for technology on paper machines.

To facilitate the transition to the new technologies over the 1990s, Irving Paper has invested heavily in the training of its workforce. The company has provided workforce literacy programs, and engaged in innovative training practices such as interactive computer-assisted learning within several dedicated job site training centres. Irving Paper’s training efforts also extend to the next generation of workers. The company has recently formed a partnership with the Saint John Campus of the New Brunswick

Community College and a number of local universities to develop a mechanical technician program, which prepares students for work in the industrial mechanical maintenance industry by teaching basic functions of pipefitting, welding, rigging, and electrical and machine work and carpentry.

These training efforts have not gone unnoticed. The company won the national award for Medium Business Literacy Initiative in the 1999-2000 Awards for Excellence in Workplace Literacy sponsored by the National Literacy Secretariat of Human Resources Development Canada. They are also recipients of the New Brunswick Labour Force Development Board's Workplace Training for Excellence Award and the Canadian Information Productivity Awards (CIPA) Excellence Award for computerized information systems.

With the investments made in new technology and training, Irving Paper has seen significant increases in daily production as well as reduced maintenance costs. It is within the lowest quartile cost of paper manufacturers, has a world-class uptime of 87 percent, and holds the world record for single-line refining of pulp. The Irving Paper mill is a 24/7 operation, and produces more than 380,000 tonnes of newsprint and specialty papers annually to exact customer specifications. To give some perspective to these figures, the company's website indicates that the mill produces enough paper each day to pave a road 2,100 km in length – from Saint John to Winnipeg.

Irving Paper's industry leading business performance is accompanied by a strong organizational commitment to safety, health and wellness. Management, union and employees have worked hard to create an organized safety system, with sound planning, effective communications, and many innovative activities and programs. As the following analysis shows, the development and implementation of safety and wellness initiatives at Irving Paper played an important, if not critical role in creating a new climate of industrial relations, and in facilitating organizational change. Safety and wellness have emerged as core principles of the firm and are essential to its business strategy.

II. Circumstances Leading to Irving Paper's Healthy Workplace Approach

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, labour / management relations had deteriorated at Irving Paper. Walkouts were common, and grievances were a weekly occurrence. The situation reached its nadir in 1990-91 with a bitter and prolonged 11-month strike over issues of contracting out and flexible work. Eventually, a new five-year deal was signed in July 1991, and the next four years were to involve what the current union president described as a "healing process".

In the wake of the strike, both the union and management acknowledged that they "had to find a different way of doing things". Against this backdrop, health and safety initiatives played a critical role in the company's turnaround. Health and safety were something that both sides could agree on as an important issue, and the process of developing and

implementing new initiatives became the foundation for better communications and the rebuilding of openness and trust between management and labour.

According to one of the union presidents at Irving Paper, the issue of safety was key to getting “buy-in” from employees:

This was something that all could agree on as an important issue. Even the worst manager and the worst employee could agree that safety was important.

But getting buy-in from employees was not going to be easy. One employee recalled that in the early 90s,

It wasn't a partnership between management and labour. Workers were very reluctant to participate in company initiatives. You have to remember that the strike meant that our membership was cut in half, and the atmosphere was bitter...we lost family and friends.

Nevertheless, both management and union agreed that growing concerns over workers' health and safety needed to be addressed, as rates of injury and weekly indemnity (WI) claims were high. There were several key developments, some of which took place over a long period of time, which began to bring labour and management together on health and safety issues, and to develop better relations overall.

A New Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee

Perhaps the most significant of these developments was the establishment of an effective joint health and safety committee. In the pre-1990 period, a Central Safety Committee (CSC) was in place to deal with safety issues. However, the CSC was largely ineffective, most often focusing on the details of plant maintenance, such as the need to “fix the railing” or “change the light bulb”.

In the post-1990 era, a new Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee (JOHSC) was established. Unlike the CSC, the new committee involved the participation of senior managers and union executives, and set itself the task of examining health and safety from a much broader perspective. One of the early tasks of the new committee was to develop a new written health and safety constitution. According to one employee, the establishment of JOHSC “gave employees ownership over the major issues”.

The JOHSC was instrumental not only in the development of new health and wellness initiatives, but also in demonstrating how joint planning and two-way communication could bring about positive changes for the employees and the company. As a result the JOHSC gave rise to the creation of a number of other committees, *including* the union-management committee and the wellness committee.

Benchmarking

A second important development was the introduction of “benchmarking” trips, whereby teams composed of management and workers began visiting selected workplaces across North America to examine best practices of other firms. Visits were made to examine safety practices, flexibility, and even landscaping around plants. Following the benchmark trips (“vision” trips as they have been called by management), new ideas and practices would then be considered for adoption within Irving Paper.

The benchmarking trips involved considerable time and expense, and provided a strong indication of the company’s commitment to a new approach on health and safety. As a collaborative exercise, benchmarking exposed management and employees to the same information, and further contributed to building trust.

Job security

A third important development was restoration of some sense of job security among employees. One interviewed employee noted that layoffs ended with the arrival of a new mill manager in the mid-1990s, and that this “went a long way to getting employees onside”.

A New Vision

Symbolizing the desire to find a “new way of doing things”, in 1991, the company name was changed from Rothesay Paper to Irving Paper Company, and was accompanied by a new Vision Statement. Under the new vision, which was developed by management and reviewed by employees, emphasis was placed on management and employees working together – through joint planning, open and frequent communications, and clearly defined lines of responsibility and accountability. Several of the vision statement’s 16 points indicate that health, safety and wellness were viewed by the company as being of central importance to its way of doing business:

- Employees work in an environment that is clean and safe. We are proud to welcome customers and our families on regular visits.
- Employees are involved in decisions that impact their jobs. Their input is sought and considered.
- Employees conduct themselves in accordance with all rules and regulations and have particular regard for environmental control and safe working practices.
- Employees are concerned about developing and maintaining good health and physical fitness.

A Proactive Approach to Health and Safety

With the new emphasis on joint planning and the establishment of an effective JOHSC committee, the approach to health and safety began to move from a reactive to proactive one. Reflecting on this transformation, Irving Paper's Human Resource Manager described it this way:

For many years, we 'put out fires' – as is the model for many companies. We would forget about safety until something happened, and put out another fire. But people were always out, lost-time accidents and costs were going up. And with this approach, you never get control of health and safety.

The new approach to health and safety focuses on prevention or as I like to describe it, preventing fires rather than putting them out. This is really what our wellness programs are all about. You could call them "preventative maintenance for employees".

Companies spend a lot of time and money on equipment maintenance, but can easily forget about human maintenance. Employees are our most important assets, and we don't want them to break down, or lose time. We began to learn that this meant avoiding accidents, but also avoiding personal crisis, health crisis, financial crisis and so on.

Irving Paper's proactive approach to workplace health is reflected in the following Wellness Policy Statement:

We at Irving Paper believe in growing and developing the potential of our employees. Through our Health Services Department, health enhancing practices and value stances for wellness are available to all of our employees. We encourage and support wellness programs that will lengthen life, reduce the incidence of illness, and assist everyone in achieving a productive, satisfying lifestyle.

Irving Paper's approach to health, safety and wellness reflects the new working arrangements at the company. The approach involves management, union and employees, makes health and wellness a central aspect of the company vision, and is proactive rather than reactive.

III. Healthy Workplace Initiatives at Irving Paper

Since the inception of its new approach to health, safety and wellness in the early 1990s, Irving Paper has put in place a broad array of activities and programs that contribute to the three key elements of a Healthy Workplace, namely the Physical Environment of the

workplace, its Health Practices, and its Social Environment and Personal Resources¹. Key activities are listed in Table 1.

Wellness Programs

There are several programs that promote and support healthy lifestyle behaviours, including smoking cessation, healthy weight maintenance, and fitness. The smoking cessation program – “kicking butt” – provides employees with information about the dangers of smoking, and access to programs, ideas and medical aids to help stop smoking. The company will pay for 100% of the costs of aids to quit smoking.

The company also provides refunds of up to \$250 per year for membership in a local fitness club, and offers lunchtime weight loss and exercise classes, and free one-on-one consultations with a dietician. Participation in these wellness programs is voluntary.

Other fitness initiatives include Walk or Golf Canada, and Swim the Atlantic programs. Workers log their swimming distance or miles walked to achieve the equivalent of walking the country or swimming the ocean. When personal goals are met, participants receive small gifts and recognition in the company newsletter.

Irving Paper also provides an Employee Assistance Program. This was established jointly by union and management to assist all employees and their families with personal problem(s) that may affect their job performance, whether physical illness, mental or emotional illness, finances, marital or family distress, alcoholism, drug abuse, legal problems or other concerns. Confidentiality is maintained at all times.

Health Services Department

A unique and important feature of Irving Paper’s healthy workplace is its on-site Health Services Department. Staffed by a full-time occupational health nurse, the department offers a variety of support and information services to employees. These include the on-site testing of blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose levels, available to all employees upon request. Employees can choose to have their test results recorded for their own further reference.

The Health Service Department also has a library and resource centre, with an up-to-date collection of videos, books, and other reading materials on a wide range of topics including smoking, heart health, sprains and strains, stress, healthy eating, cholesterol, eye safety, lung cancer, grief and grieving, and many others.

Active Communications

Another prominent feature of Irving Paper’s healthy workplace initiatives is the monthly health, safety and wellness information sessions, and quarterly crew meetings. Guest

¹ National Quality Institute, *Canadian Healthy Workplace Criteria*, Toronto, 1998.

speakers are brought into the workplace to address a wide variety of topics. In one recent session a physician was brought in to address health issues and to provide an overview of trends in the Canadian health care system. One of the logistic challenges of this activity is ensuring that the variety of crews working in different parts of the mill and on different shifts have the opportunity to participate. As a result, as many as 30 or 40 sessions will be organized in order to ensure full participation.

Special Events

Irving's wellness initiatives also include a number of annual and special events. The company holds an annual wellness fair, sponsors a triathlon team, and supports a recreation association and its numerous social and recreational events. The company also holds an annual Health and Safety Poster Contest for the children and grandchildren of employees. Posters are placed throughout the mill and winners receive a new bicycle and helmet.

Occupational Safety

Underpinning Irving Paper's wellness initiatives is a solid foundation of sound occupational safety procedures and programs, which are under continuous evaluation, development and improvement. For example, a Due Diligence Program was initiated in 2000 to look at exposures in the mill, including WHMIS, Heat and Noise, Chemical, and Mobile Equipment. In stage 1 of the program, all employees and staff completed a survey asking a variety of questions about knowledge and understanding of procedures that identify and control hazards, whether there is accountability of safety and health, whether adequate health and safety inspections are carried out. Survey results used to develop an action plan.

Similar on-going safety initiatives are evident in areas such as emergency response, ergonomics, confined space entry, safety equipment, and so on. Safety training is a regular and on-going activity at Irving Paper.

Table 1
Selected Examples of Healthy Workplace Initiatives at Irving Paper Company

Category	Specific Initiatives	Comments
Physical Environment (Policies and initiatives that reinforce and support a safe and healthy physical environment)	Due Diligence Program	Sub-committee established to address and improve upon hazard exposures, safety accountability and inspections
	Air Quality Audit	Independent audit involving employee survey and air sampling
	Hearing Tests	Employees must have initial and periodic audiograms
Health Practices (Policies and initiatives that enable and support healthy lifestyles, behaviours and coping skills for dealing with life in healthy ways)	Smoking cessation program – “Kicking Butt”	Company pays for medical assistance and devices (the “patch”, classes, hypnosis, etc.) Available to all employees, spouses and children of employees.
	Healthy Weight Maintenance	In-house nutritionist develops diet and exercise programs on a one-on-one basis; lunch-time weight loss class
	Fitness Programs	Walk or Golf Canada Program; Swim the Atlantic Program;
	Cardiac Program	Up to \$250 per year for employees and families to join local fitness club; lunch-time exercise class
	Flu shots	Occupational health nurse measures blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose upon request Annual, free of charge
	Library and Resource Centre	Videos, books and pamphlets on a range of topics including smoking, heart health, healthy eating, cholesterol, etc. Open to employees and their families.
Social Environment and Personal Resources (Policies and initiatives that support and enhance the personal coping skills, human relationships and communications known to have an important influence on mental and physical health)	Employee Assistance Program	Assists employees and families with personal problems relating to mental, emotional illness, finances, marital distress, drug abuse, legal problems, etc. strictly confidential
	Modified Duty Program	Offered to employees with occupational injury or illness and medical work restrictions, so that workers can perform productive and rehabilitative work without increased risk of injury
	Irving Paper Recreation Association	Wide range of recreational and social activities: golf and pool tournaments, dances, etc.
	Library and Resource Centre	Videos, books and pamphlets on a range of topics including stress, grieving, etc. Open to employees and their families.

IV. Links to the Organization's Goals and Business Strategy

Irving Paper does not see itself as attempting to “balance” its central business objective of making money with health and wellness goals. Instead, health and wellness initiatives are one of the means of achieving organizational goals. The linkages between safety and wellness and the organization's goals and business strategy can be illustrated in several ways.

Systematic and On-going Focus on Safety, Health and Wellness

Planning and evaluation of safety and wellness is a prominent feature of management meetings. According to Irving Paper's human resource manager, senior management meetings always involve discussion of health and safety issues and a review of the statistics on recordable incidents, first aids, claims costs, absenteeism, and so on. Similarly, health and safety is discussed at each morning's meeting of departmental managers.

Resources

Financial and other resources allocated for safety and wellness are not viewed as discretionary spending that can be curtailed during periods of weak demand. The Human Resources manager commented:

During down times, it's easy to cut back on health and safety. But we don't. It's part of our strategy to make money when times are bad, and more money when times are good. During the last downturn in 1998, we put off our new technology project by six months, but continued with our health safety and wellness initiatives – no cutting back.

Recognition and Reward

A third illustration of the link between healthy workplace initiatives and business strategy is the inclusion of safety and wellness into the firm's variable compensation / group incentive system, called the IQ200 balanced scorecard. Under this scheme, the bonus pay of hourly employees is calculated quarterly on the basis of six criteria – safety, wellness, environment, product quality, production and cost. Points are scored in each area, based on the mill's quarterly performance statistics. The criteria are weighted, and favour volume of production, but safety and wellness make up approximately one quarter of the total points available. Safety performance is measured in terms of recordable incidents and wellness in terms of absenteeism. In management's view, these “outcome” measures are fair and appropriate ways to assess safety and wellness performance. One interviewed employee suggested that there was some initial reluctance to participate in the incentive program, since some felt there would be pressure to not report accidents. “But this hasn't happened. People are now aware of production, and now we know why accidents happen – it's a very healthy attitude”.

Accountability

A final illustration of the integration between safety and wellness and business objectives is that managers' personal performance reviews take into consideration how effectively workplace health initiatives have been implemented. Poor reviews affect a manager's annual increases. While performance evaluations and remuneration are not judged solely on the manager's implementation of workplace health initiatives, they are a contributing factor that according to the human resource manager, are effective in creating "ownership and accountability".

Overall accountability for the implementation and management of wellness initiatives lies with the human resource manager, whose personal performance review considers the nature and success of programs introduced, the statistics on health and safety within the plant, and any complaints about the program.

V. Decision-making Structure

Decisions about healthy workplace initiatives rely heavily upon a well-developed structure of joint committees and sub-committees. There are five main committees: Joint Occupational Health and Safety; Wellness; Employee Assistance; Training and Development; and Union-Management. Within each of these, sub-committees may be struck to take on particular issues or special projects. Each committee has formal union representation and includes at least one senior manager.

Planning and decision making for healthy workplace initiatives rests upon the involvement and inputs of managers, employees and union representatives from departments throughout the mill, via the committees. Not only does this make for better-informed decisions, but also, as the human resources manager points out, serves to facilitate the implementation of new initiatives and policies:

The only way to win trust from employees is to get people involved. When committees make recommendations, people get behind it because they had a representative there.

The committees, each one working in its own area of responsibility, play several critical roles in the decision-making process:

- *Monitoring and evaluating ongoing programs, policies and initiatives:* Committees meet monthly or quarterly to review the progress and effectiveness of on-going activities. Committees may review pertinent statistics, the results of employee surveys and the informal observations and input from employees throughout the mill.
- *Planning yearly activities:* Each committee develops goals and action plans. The wellness committee, for example, meets once a year offsite to plan the coming year's activities (see Figure 1), including topics for information sessions. The plan is based on a needs assessment, which takes place through a variety of techniques

(surveys, crew meetings, quarterly meetings, and informal input). Action Plans specify goals to be achieved, actions to be undertaken, key dates, and committee members charged with overseeing various actions.

- *Research and development of new workplace initiatives:* Committees play a critical role in researching and developing new workplace initiatives. The company provides the resources necessary for committee members to examine best practices through attendance at conferences and workshops, or through benchmarking tours. For example, a behavioural sub-committee (under the JOHSC) was recently struck to investigate the value of behaviour or observation based safety programs at Irving Paper. Members of the sub-committee, comprised of management and labour, toured five mills with behavioural programs, two in the southern United States, one in Toronto and two in Nova Scotia.
- *Recommendations:* Committees develop recommendations for improvements to existing programs and develop proposals for new initiatives in a variety of areas including training and skill development, policies and procedures, purchase of equipment, and so on. In most cases, proposed activities are presented to the JOHSC for endorsement. Final decisions on all proposed initiatives and activities lie with the plant manager, who is a member of the Joint Health and Safety Committee.

There is a strong sense among committee members that their recommendations – based on sound research and input from management and labour – will receive fair consideration. One interviewed employee commented as follows:

If a resolution comes out of committee, there's almost no doubt it will be followed through by management. It's almost like the committee *is* management.

This sense of confidence and predictability also flows from the fact that each committee has its own budget, set annually and allocated through the human resources department. According to the human resources manager, dedicated budgetary resources give committees confidence that there is “no one from the top saying you can't do that”.

Budgets may also be ramped up to accommodate new initiatives or expenditures recommended by committees. For example, the wellness committee requested and received an increased budget to facilitate an increase in the subsidy for employees wishing to join health clubs.

Figure 1.
Wellness Action Plan at Irving Paper

Wellness Action Plan 2001				
Goal: Key Indicators	Action	Date	Responsible	
<p>1. To increase employee awareness of glucose & cholesterol levels.</p> <p>2. To educate the employees about topics from STD claims</p> <p>3. To increase participation in fitness by club membership for employees and families.</p> <p>4. Determine participation in activities.</p>	<p>1. Purchase equipment to test glucose and cholesterol. Testing Training. Prepare survey</p> <p>2. Plan Guest speakers for the topics.</p> <p>3. Prepare schedule:</p> <p><u>Period 2</u> January 29 to Feb.23rd. Herbal Medicine & interaction with prescription drugs.</p> <p><u>Period 3</u> Feb.26th to Mar 23rd. <u>Cholesterol & BP testing in Health Services.</u></p> <p><u>Period 4</u> Mar.26th to April 20th Nutrition Exercise & Balancing Cholesterol and your Blood pressure.</p> <p><u>Period 5</u> April 24 to May 18th <u>Blood screening for Sugar in Health Services.</u></p> <p><u>Period 6</u> May 21nd to June 15th Do You Have Diabetes Type II? Its Preventable!</p> <p><u>Period 10</u> Sept.10th to Oct.5th <u>Body Mass Index (BMI) testing in Health Services.</u></p> <p><u>Period 11</u> Oct. 8th. To Nov.2nd What is a normal BMI? How do I control It?</p> <p><u>Period 13</u> Dec.3rd to Dec 31st excluding Christmas week. Dust & Mist masks: Protect your Lungs.</p>	<p>Dec. 22nd/00 Dec. 11th 00</p> <p>Advertise Dec.29th/00 Advertise by Feb.1/01 Book Period 4 Advertise Mar/15th/01</p> <p>Advertise Period 5 April 1st Book Period 6 Book Period 13 speaker May 1/01</p> <p>Advertise period 10 Aug.20</p> <p>Oct. 20/01</p> <p>Jan. and ongoing</p>	<p>Caroll Hennessy Rob Arseneau</p> <p>Caroll Hennessy</p> <p>Caroll Hennessy</p> <p>Caroll Hennessy Shamus Donovan Brian Sheldrick</p> <p>Caroll Hennessy</p> <p>The Occupational Health Nurse</p> <p>Caroll Hennessy</p>	
	4. Provide measurable Wellness Programs and a recognition process for employees.	<p>Wellness Programs: Maintain Wellness board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active Participation Club or sports • Healthy weight maintenance • Kicking Butt • Walk or Golf Canada: order T-shirts 	Feb. 2001	<p>Rob Arseneau Bill Maguire Brad Doley Jim Mott</p>
	Evaluate Wellness Action plan as required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellness committee to meet 4 times a year. 	As required.	<p>Rob Arseneau Shamus Donovan Brian Sheldrick</p>
	Provide wellness material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase wellness books videos, etc to lend 	As required	

VI. Communications

The human resources department has identified communications as one of four key “focus areas” (the others being incentives/celebrations; employee health and safety; and employee development). The company supports its communications efforts with a full-time desktop publishing department, and has developed numerous communications tools to facilitate the exchange of safety, health and wellness information among and between staff and employees.

- *Wellness Newsletter*: Called *Vital Signs*, this triennial publication draws from up to date medical texts, wellness documents and magazines to provide work/family health information and to encourage good wellness choices. Each edition includes a special focus or “hot topic”, nutrition and fitness information. The newsletter is also a key way in which new wellness initiatives or programs at Irving are promoted, and includes a section that reports on wellness successes achieved by employees of Irving Paper (for example, the number of wellness program

members; information session attendance; total weight loss achieved; smoking cessation successes, and so on).

- *Bulletin boards.* There are several bulletin boards throughout the mill, including a board dedicated to safety and wellness information, events and programs.
- *Weekly Newsletter and Special Edition Magazine:* Called *People in Paper*, these publications report on all aspects of industry and plant news, including regular sections devoted to safety, health and wellness. The publications provide health information and healthy lifestyle tips, updates on safety and wellness plans and activities, and report on the work of committees and sub-committees. The magazine also celebrates company and employee accomplishments, and provides reports in a variety of areas: awards received, IQ200 balanced scorecard results, recreation association activities, union-management partnerships, retirees, new employees, new technologies, and many others.
- *Posters:* Many of the key safety policy and planning documents are prominently displayed in large posters throughout the mill. These include the wellness and safety action plans, a list of monthly health and safety themes, safety eyeglass policy, and accident prevention messages. In addition, safety posters created by employees' children as part of the annual wellness fair activities are prominently displayed throughout the mill.

Personal Communications

In addition to published materials, a great deal of emphasis is placed on personal communications. Perhaps most notable in this regard are the Quarterly crew meetings – four-hour sessions with two hours devoted to a review of business (industry developments; mill performance; departmental information; new technologies, etc.) and two hours to safety and wellness. These meetings provide a forum to hear from employees, and to administer employee surveys.

Given the number of crews and shifts in the mill, the quarterly meetings require considerable time and effort to organize and deliver. In fact, each departmental manager will make 13 presentations, with the whole process requiring a week to complete. The Human Resources manager estimates that management probably spends about one and a half months per year in Quarterly meetings, which includes preparation, presentation and feedback.

When asked why so much emphasis and so many resources are placed on communications, the human resources manager responded as follows:

Because it creates a comfort zone in the mill, where problems can be resolved before they're problems. It helps avoid the problem and burden of documentation when things go wrong.

Further affirmation of the benefits of effective communication is apparent following each quarterly meeting:

Everyone knows the numbers and is better educated in the business. Employees learn about health and wellness. Everyone walks away with something. And invariably, the next week we see that production is up.

Another important role for communications is to help with the successful implementation of new initiatives. Both management and labour, in separate interviews, made reference to a specific example, involving the introduction of a new and mandatory safety glasses policy:

We can simply put in a policy to say everyone should wear eyeglasses, or face discipline. But we would rather educate employees that it's a good thing to do. So we look at numbers, videos, send people on courses, and so on. Then we introduce gradually, to get all concerns and issues out in the open, and get maximum buy-in. Programs are then successful (*Human Resources manager*).

Through committee meetings and quarterly meetings, bulletin board postings and newsletters, management lets people know well in advance what's coming. By the time of implementation, everyone knew they were going to be putting glasses on - and why (*Employee*).

Employees' assessment of communications was positive. Specific reference was made to the effectiveness of Quarterly Crew meetings and newsletters, and the opportunities available for employee feedback and input. One employee described management's promotion of new initiatives and practices as "phenomenal".

For Irving Paper's management, good communications – in health and safety or other areas – is the key to generating trust.

VII. Commitment to a Healthy Workplace

Support for the healthy workplace initiatives extends to the very ownership of Irving Paper. According to senior managers, Irving Paper is something of a test case project for other businesses within the Irving stable of companies. It is seen as the "cornerstone" of all new programs, including the introduction of new technologies.

According to the Human Resources manager, management's commitment to a healthy workplace is illustrated most clearly by its willingness to provide the necessary dollars for new initiatives, and to ensure that workers have the paid time necessary to participate in committees and to take part in benchmarking trips:

Even when there have been harder times, the support was there. For example, we sent 13 people on a two-week benchmarking trip to the U.S. at a time when the company was losing money.

Employees agreed that management is firmly committed to a healthy workplace, and also cited as evidence, management's willingness to spend money – “on training, sending people to conferences” and so on.

Both management and employees spoke of the employees' commitment to a healthy workplace. One employee said that employees are “more committed than ever” to the safety and wellness initiatives “because they see the numbers at quarterly meetings... they know people aren't getting hurt”. For this employee, a telling demonstration of employee commitment is that “workers are comfortable now...they're not afraid to share knowledge of good working practices or to identify when someone is doing bad practices”. According to Tom Long, CEP Local 907 president, commitment to health and safety is a two-way street, and is aptly demonstrated in each and every union-management committee meeting:

The *first* thing we talk about at each meeting is health and safety – not grievances, not productivity, not labour management relations.

VIII. Impacts and Analysis

Employee participation

Participation in Irving Paper's wellness programs is on a voluntary basis. As such, management endeavors to keep track of employee involvement as one way of gauging program success.

Statistics are kept on the overall number of wellness members, (about one-third of all employees), attendance at speaker sessions (generally, about 75% to 80% participation rate), and involvement and “successes” in each of the various programs and activities. Examples include the number of employees in the Maintaining a Health Weight Program and the total cumulative lbs. lost, the number of employees in smoking cessation program and the number who have quit smoking. These statistics are regularly reported in the wellness newsletter as a way of celebrating success. For example, the September 2000 issue of *Vital Signs* – the wellness newsletter – gave the following report:

We are very proud of the employees in our Smoking Cessation Programs – 48 people have participated and to date 40 have been successful.

The company also keeps track of the number of employees using Health Services Department (about 15 people per day) and involvement in the Do You Have a Healthy Heart Test program. This latter program has been very successful, with 113 employees (out of 375) having had their blood pressure, weight and cholesterol checked, and eight recommended for follow-up with their family physician. This on-going program continues to see an average of 5-6 people per day reporting to the Health Services for new or re- testing. Similar success is evident in the blood screening glucose testing program, with 56 employees participating and three referred to their family doctor. This on-going testing program involves about five people per week.

Employees and management generally felt that participation in the various wellness initiatives was high. One employee also noted that there is a lot of “silent participation” - referring to people who take advantage of rebates for aids to quit smoking, or have taken up weight loss activities, but who “don’t want their name on a chart, who don’t want it noted if they fail.” Management was also aware of this “silent participation”, and was happy to see employees participating in whatever fashion they personally felt most comfortable with. This flexibility of participation was acknowledged by management and employees as an important way of maximizing employee involvement.

Although the company’s IQ200 incentive pay scheme awards points for wellness (measured as absenteeism), employees interviewed did not feel that it contributed directly to increased participation in wellness programs.

Management also monitors employee satisfaction with the various program initiatives, informally through individual word of mouth feedback presented at committee meetings, and more formally through employee surveys. For example, surveys are carried out following each guest speaker presentation to gauge the effectiveness of the speaker and the topic.

Health and Safety

Employees felt that the wellness initiatives were having a positive impact on worker health and life style behaviours. Commenting on health issues such as smoking, cholesterol, blood pressure and diabetes, one employee said

The awareness (among workers) is remarkable. Ten years ago, there was one non-smoker in my department. Today, there is just one smoker. Part of my department’s action plan for the coming year is to become the first completely non-smoking debarment in the mill.

Interviewed employees also agreed that there are definitely less people getting injured, and spoke of the relationship between wellness initiatives and safety:

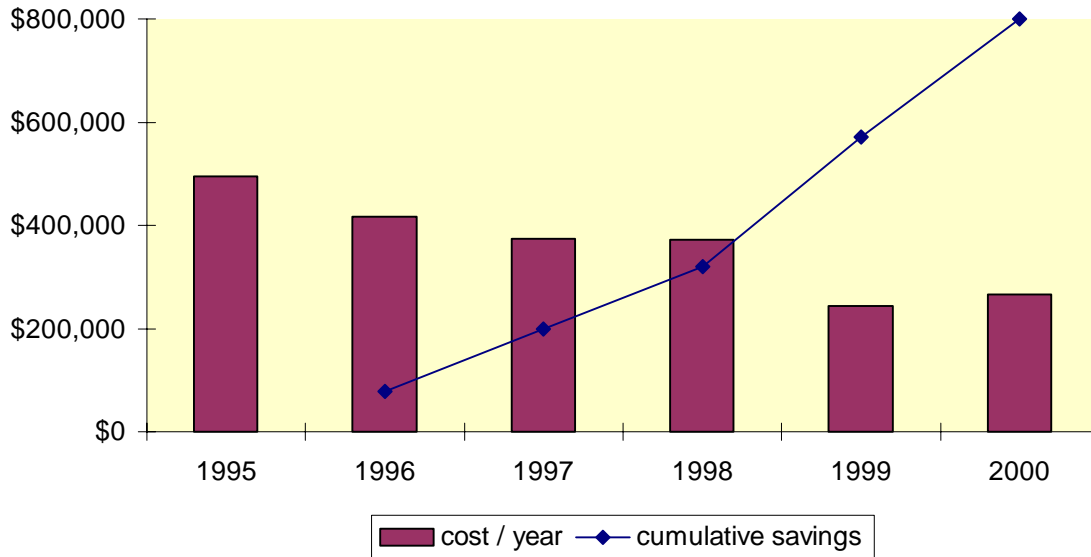
Wellness activities make the workplace safer. If employees are better fit and generally more interested in health issues, they’ll have a better attitude toward safety, be more mentally alert, and fewer injuries will occur. When you have more awareness yourself, you’ll be more aware of others too.

The comments of employees are supported by an examination of Irving Paper’s Short Term Disability cost of claims, which have fallen by more than one-half since the mid-1990s. As shown in Figure 2, costs fell from \$494 thousand in 1995 to a low of \$243 thousand in 1999, and were somewhat higher in 2000 (\$267 thousand). In monthly figures, the company spends an average of \$22 thousand less today on weekly indemnity than it did a mere five years ago. Total cumulative savings since 1995 amount to nearly \$800,000.

Irving Paper has seen a similar reduction in WHSCC Cost of Claims, which have fallen from a monthly average of about \$5,000 to the current \$2,000 per month.

Figure 2

STD (WI) Cost of Claims History – Irving Paper



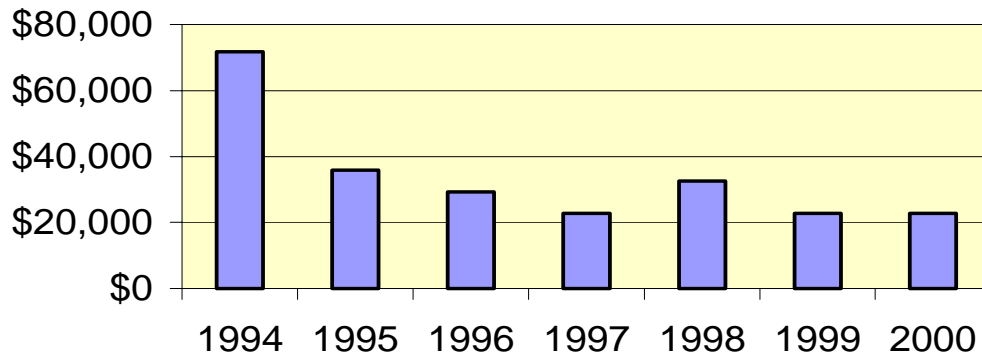
Source: Irving Paper Ltd. Human Resources Department

Labour Management Relations

Management also believes their approach to workplace health and safety has had a positive impact on labour-management relations. Even though it is difficult to establish cause and effect, there is little question in the minds of both managers and union representatives that the *process* of developing, implementing and evaluating safety and wellness programs, with their emphasis on participation, joint committees, and effective communications, has led to an improvement in labour-management relations.

According to the human resources manager, without our approach, “we would have had more grievances – no question”. Before 1992, there was an average of 50 to 60 grievances, and three to four arbitrations per year. Since that time, grievances average nine per year in CEP Local 601 and two per year in local 907. Arbitrations have also fallen dramatically. In CEP 601 there have been 6 arbitrations in nine years and just one arbitration in nine years in among members of local 907. Management at Irving Paper estimates that since 1994, the cumulative savings due to reduced grievances and arbitrations have amounted to over \$250,000 (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Cost of grievances - 1994-2000
Irving Paper**



Like management, employees also drew linkages between healthy workplace initiatives and labour-management relations. One employee noted that people feel as though the company is interested in *them*, and as a result, “trust has most definitely – although slowly – increased”.

Job Satisfaction and Control Over Work

Management feels strongly that healthy workplace initiatives have had a positive influence on what are perhaps more intangible outcomes. When asked about impacts, the top-of-mind responses from the Human Resources manager were: 1) a better-informed and educated workforce; 2) a more mature and satisfied workforce; 3) a workplace culture where it is okay to ask questions. In management’s opinion, these positive impacts on workers and the workplace also contribute to a more productive and innovative workforce.

Employees reiterated management’s view that safety and wellness initiatives have had “very definite and positive impacts on job satisfaction and morale”. One employee said that involvement in the various committees provided an opportunity to get away from the regular job on occasion, and to become more knowledgeable in the process, making the work experience more satisfying. As a result, employees felt that involvement in the planning and implementation of healthy workplace initiatives was “empowering”, and gave them a greater sense of control over their work and working conditions.

Unintended Impacts

When asked if there were any unintended impacts of the wellness initiatives (either positive or negative), employees mentioned several. First, the involvement of employees on committees was seen as increasing self-worth and confidence. As a result, one employee talked about “developing leaders among the participants”, suggesting that “people on committees develop self-worth that carries through to the rest of their lives”.

The wellness initiatives were also seen as having impacts on other programs at Irving Paper. Specific reference was made to the Employee Assistance Program, in which numbers accessing the program were up, but costs were down. One employee, a member of the EAP committee, understood this pattern to mean that more informed workers are not embarrassed about accessing the program (hence the increased numbers), seek assistance earlier on, and require fewer consultations as a result (hence the lower costs). “People are not embarrassed, they’re more aware and more educated so they can deal with problems a lot easier”.

Employees also saw unintended impacts extending beyond the workplace. One employee thought that increased health and safety awareness at work was carried home. And while not based on any “hard evidence” this employee felt that there were fewer home injuries, contributing to reduction of workplace absenteeism.

One employee with strong involvement in the union commented on how the safety and wellness initiatives have benefited the union itself:

Members of committees come back to union meetings and report. They want everyone to know what they’re doing. Union meetings are now more informative rather than a place to air your beefs. It has also made the union stronger because the company realized things would be better when the union is involved. The union is not sitting back and letting things happen – they’re involved.

When asked whether there were aspects of the initiatives that the union and employees might regard as less positive, employees were hard-pressed to think of any. One employee said that there may be a few who criticize management, but these people are likely those who will always criticize. This employee felt that it was difficult to think of negative aspects of the wellness initiatives since they all involved voluntary participation: “nothing is forced on you – you can participate, or you don’t have to... What’s the problem?”

IX. Future Directions and Lessons Learned

Generally, employees thought the company “should continue on the same track”. By this, they did not mean that the current set of initiatives should remain unchanged, but that the dynamic and participatory process of defining needs and researching and implementing programs would result in a desired and continuing evolution of healthy workplace initiatives. Employees said they were generally comfortable with the current pace and direction of such changes.

One of the important lessons to be learned from the experiences at Irving Paper is that good communications and labour-management relations are important ingredients for successful safety and wellness initiatives. Indeed, management, union and employees agreed that the lack of these qualities was the biggest challenge in getting the initiatives off the ground. However, what makes the case of Irving Paper particularly unique is how

the process of developing safety and wellness initiatives served as a key institutional vehicle for building good communications and trust, and better industrial relations.

Employees suggested that for other organizations considering the adoption of wellness programs, it is critical that management endorses the program and its activities, and ensures that they take place by providing sufficient resources – in terms of time and money. The Human Resources manager went further to suggest that management must not only invest resources, but be aware that the return on investment might take time to be realized:

We knew we had to make major changes in the plant and we knew there would be an expense, and that the payback would be harder to see. But top management realized that there would be results. Some companies can't see a return quickly, so they give up.

Finally, employees suggested that other companies contemplating wellness initiatives “not be afraid to try something different”. Given their experiences at Irving Paper, and having witnessed the turn around in labour-management relations from just a decade ago, employees agreed that trying something different could produce very desirable results.