

WILLIAMS SEAFOODS

“Investment in prevention pays dividends”



Williams Seafoods

Tips and Tricks

Suggestions from Williams Seafoods to other organisations



Clear communication to ensure the flow of information

Clear communication and clear systems help everyone know what is expected of them and what they can expect at work. That means the work gets done quickly in a safe way.



Be proactive in health and safety systems

Be proactive and enthusiastic about health and safety because in the long run it will save you time and money.



Try to reduce the risk of injuries as much as you can

Think, plan and invest in systems to reduce the risk of injury. If there is a way to reduce the risk then do it. Help your workers stay safe. This will reduce time lost at work.

The Organisation

Williams Seafoods is a seafood wholesaler based in South Australia's Limestone coast region. The company has successfully operated its lobster export business for nearly 20 years and has a combination of both seasonal and fulltime (approximately, 10-15) employees. By maintaining a focus on the wellbeing of their workers, the company has had only two workers' compensation claims in the past 20 years, saving money on lost time, recruitment, injury management and premiums.

The Seafood processing industry has one of the highest annual incidence rates of claims of any industry. In 2010-11, the incidence rate of accepted compensation claims in the industry was 136 claims per 1000 employees compared to the average rate for all industries of 28.9. In the same year the incidence rate of serious claims resulting in one week or more time lost was 49.5 compared to the all industries rate of 11.9. By contrast Williams Seafood has had only two injuries in the 20 years since their establishment. One of these was a secondary injury related to an old football injury to the knee and the other, many years ago, was a sprained ankle.

Typical work tasks in this organisation include seafood processing with primary tasks being grading, sorting, cleaning, and packing of export orders, as well as transportation of goods.

Key Initiatives and Achievements

Williams Seafoods describes its primary focus as the wellbeing and safety of its staff, having consciously decided to invest in this area 20 years ago. This focus has contributed to savings in claims costs, the retention of a stable workforce and a steady growth rate in a competitive market.

The combination of high staff retention and the low number of injuries has meant the company can focus resources on the ongoing up-skilling of its workers rather than on recruitment, induction training and sustaining suitable duties for workers injured at work. Time and money saved on premium increases or on managing injury have gone towards making the workplace even safer.

The only recent injury this company experienced was to a driver who had worked with the company for many years and whose injury was a re-aggravation of a previous non-work related injury. The owners were dedicated to working collaboratively with the worker's doctor and supporting the worker's recovery via graduated return to work. The driver was off work for 8 months, but stayed in constant contact with his employers and co-workers and remained part of the family business during his recovery.

Major Themes

Two major themes arise from interviewing workers in this company; the first is the benefit of having good systems in place from the company's inception and the second is having ongoing excellent communication within the business. Limited

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resources can mean that small businesses can ignore long term sustainability in favour of getting through the daily work with the result that their business may not be run as efficiently as some larger organisations. Williams Seafood's strategy to invest in ergonomic systems of work and in maintaining positive relationships with staff has contributed hugely to its success as a business.

Good systems and proactive management of health and safety

The creation of effective health and safety systems at Williams Seafoods has contributed to a history of only two workers' compensation claims in 20 years. This sends a significant message to other employers that when you concentrate on your workers' wellbeing, you are actually concentrating on your business bottom line. Williams Seafoods chose to invest heavily up front in equipment and systems to reduce the level of body stress on its workers. This type of work environment would usually involve a large amount of heavy lifting, but with the implementation of ergonomic systems, the potential for claims is reduced. Williams Seafoods uses a system of trolleys, conveyors and rollers in all areas within the factory. Trucks bringing unprocessed produce into the factory are unloaded onto conveyors, which are utilised to the final packing stations where produce is loaded back onto trucks for export. Over the past 20 years the cost and time savings for this business have been significant. The company's view is that you need to *"Be willing to upgrade equipment as soon as possible to minimise injuries"* and by doing this you will save money in the long run.

Part of the investment in health and safety has been to proactively manage the health of workers. Workers are encouraged to report all incidents and concerns with respect to pain or work safety issues. This allows the company to act immediately. For example; wrist straps would be purchased for a worker on the same day wrist

pain is reported. To prevent further injury, Williams Seafoods may also pay for ongoing treatment and alternative equipment. This has successfully addressed the needs of staff at Williams Seafoods, allowing the retention of older workers. This also demonstrates the commitment of the business owners to their workers, creating low absenteeism and low staff turnover suggesting a workplace culture where people want to work.

Well-documented systems allow the employer to identify issues and continually improve the systems. Part of the health and wellbeing system is implemented through the use of security cameras that are primarily required to monitor food safety standards. The cameras for this workplace have a two-fold purpose: the first is to ensure that product arrives and leaves the factory in a timely fashion; the second is that through regular monitoring of the safety of staff on the factory floor, the employer is able to act immediately to adapt processes or provide additional training where worker safety may be at risk. The safety of workers is paramount and no excuses are made for ensuring safety at all times.

Excellent and consistent communication

Williams Seafoods prides itself on its excellent communication systems and reports that this has possibly influenced the low staff turnover. Even the seasonal workers are the same people each year. With clear communication and clearly defined routines, a worker has the ability to concentrate on the work at hand. Workers are provided job descriptions and detailed induction booklets upon commencing employment and this is followed up with an annual review.

Unclear communication can cause unnecessary stress in workers and lead to workplace injury. The consistency of the safety message by Williams Seafoods has led to workers feeling that they are supported and able to report all incidents, which allows the employer to take immediate action and improve the system. Having clear *"communication between all team members"* ensures that everyone can *"work together well and effectively"*. Clear and open communication allows the team to work together, look out for each other and maintain, and improve productivity.

References

SWA (2014a). *National Data Set for Compensation-based Statistics: Seafood Processing*. Provided by SWA on 3rd July 2014.