

Check Against Delivery

Partnerships in Injury Reduction Breakfast

October 17, 2013 Calgary

Hon Dave Hancock

Thank you for the opportunity to meet and talk with you today.

Good morning and thank you to all of you for coming.

Our annual breakfast is an important opportunity to celebrate our successes in workplace health and safety.

But it is also a chance for me to share with you some of the good work we've done to improve areas that need our attention.

And to recognize each of you as partners in this endeavour.

In Occupational Health and Safety, we're always repeating the same mantra:

"Our goal is to make sure Albertans come home safely at the end of each work day."

I know that each of us here understands our responsibility to the workers who help make this province great.

But it's short-sighted to think that just because we repeat it over and over, the mantra remains top of mind each day on the job.

And our preventable workplace injury and incident statistics show that.

The daily routines of our work – while necessary – can be a distraction that pulls us away from our pledge to improve health and safety in the workplace.

And so it's part of my job as Minister of Human Services – in partnership with each of you – to reaffirm our commitment, and remind us of our major responsibilities.

Every Albertan deserves to have a safe and healthy workplace.

And we must continue to collaborate with one another, and our workers, to make sure we deliver on that promise.

Workplace health and safety **is** a shared responsibility.

But when people get sick, get hurt, or get killed on the job – their families and the public often look to **us** for answers.

I liken this responsibility to the same one we preach to young Albertans and vulnerable Albertans – about safe sex.

Lately, what we've said is that when it comes to intimate relationships, what you don't know can hurt you.

It's a message that is working.

Whether it's about addictions, violence or abuse – our job is to do our utmost to make sure every Albertan has the knowledge to protect themselves from harm - to prevent unwanted outcomes - and to know where to get help when they need it.

My responsibility as minister, and yours as Partners in Injury Reduction, is the same.

And it is the same for Alberta's workers.

Understanding our individual roles either as employers or workers is how we will build safer workplaces, see fewer fatalities, and foster communities and a culture where people look out for one another by instinct, not by order and legislation.

Still, the question that most often comes up when it comes to workplace health and safety is why aren't we doing more?

Well, I am here today to tell you that as a government, we **are** doing more, and that as our partners in injury reduction, **you** are doing outstanding work that deserves recognition.

Before we move on to the awards that will be presented this morning, let me take a moment to share what some people outside of this room think about workplace health and safety in Alberta.

It reminds us that regardless of our successes, we must maintain constant vigilance to prevent the workplace incidents we all fear.

The recent news stories about workplace fatalities in Alberta can sum up a common sentiment...

...too many workers are being killed on the job.

Regardless of how the numbers are interpreted, these stories resonate because they play to the fears that many Albertans may have about their workplaces.

These fears must be addressed.

The numbers reported are accurate.

Workplace fatalities were higher last year than in recent years, and this year's numbers are also high.

We lost 145 workers on the job in 2012 – an 18% increase since 2008.

This year, as of the end of June, we had recorded 104 fatalities.

These are sobering numbers, and make no mistake – each of them is a tragedy.

The death of each of these workers leaves behind a trail of grief that no politician – no business owner – and no government can ever ease.

Now, I can tell you that the truth is less tragic than the numbers imply; that the biggest spike in fatalities is due to work-related diseases that were contracted many years ago.

But that, or any other explanation I can offer rings hollow to those who've experienced the loss of a loved one on the job, or because of their job.

What doesn't ring hollow though is hope, and the promise of improvement in the years to come.

That is why government has undertaken a comprehensive update of our Occupational Health and Safety compliance measures.

To start with, we've put in place two new enforcement tools – one of which came into force at the beginning of this month.

We can now impose administrative penalties against those who show a blatant disregard for health and safety.

Penalties will be up to \$10,000 per violation, per day.

These penalties give us a new enforcement tool to show the most chronic non-compliers that respecting health and safety isn't optional.

It's the only way to be successful, and anything else represents a failure.

In January, we'll be launching a new Ticketing system.

If a worker or employer is caught contravening any of about 70 health and safety laws, they can get a ticket between \$100 and \$500.

These new tools make our enforcement measures among the most robust in Canada, and are part of a makeover we're doing in our compliance enforcement area.

We are developing new ways of identifying those who need the most help improving their health and safety systems, and we're putting them under a microscope.

Our employer records database will also become more detailed.

It will allow workers to make more informed decisions about which employers they will trust with their safety and which they won't.

Our goal is to encourage compliance – to be persuasive.

And where we struggle to convince delinquent employers of the right path, we will carry a big stick.

Workers and employers who risk the health and safety of others will be held accountable like never before in this province.

Our hope is that they will recognize the penalties are far greater than the cost of doing business, and make positive and rapid efforts to improve.

And that is where all of you come in.

As our Partners in Injury Reduction, you are setting the health and safety example we want others to aspire to.

You will be called upon to help, and together we will make this province a safer, healthier place to live, work and do business.

We have clear objectives when it comes to health and safety in the workplace and together we can meet those objectives.

We have challenges ahead of us, but today is about acknowledging those who are leading the way in building a better Alberta.

I'm here today to welcome a group of new Partners to the Injury Reduction program, and to recognize those among you who have achieved something few others have – a new, highest level of certification recognized by the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA).

BOMA Certification recognizes a commitment to improving health and safety through its BEST program, which gives building owners the tools to operate their buildings in a more environmentally friendly way.

In essence the BOMA BEST recognition is all about managing resources.

It acknowledges those among you who have done their utmost to show improvement in matters of energy, water, waste reduction and environmental management systems.

As we enjoy one another's company this morning, let's not forget that without protecting our human resources by creating safe and healthy workplaces, such achievements would not be possible.

Thank you, and work safely.