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How fit and healthy is your workforce?



Freightliner Trucks released its FIT system in 2013

In an industry that is struggling to attract younger employees that are needed to help replace an aging workforce, it is becoming even more important to consider the health and wellbeing of your employees.

Putting a workplace wellness programme in place is a good start. This can range from simply providing employees

with information on health and fitness, to having subsidised healthy food choices or a gymnasium facility available. When you operate a business, your most valuable asset is the people who make up your workforce.

By investing in a wellness programme for your workplace, the payback will be immediately obvious, by lowering your

business costs with better performing employees, lower absenteeism through health issues. By simply promoting good health among employees and creating a positive environment to work in, you could reduce employee turnover and recruitment costs.

The Ministry of Health recommends adults do at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity at least five times



per week. According to a recent health survey, only 51 percent of adult New Zealanders are meeting this recommendation. Low physical activity accounts for a significant number of all illnesses, disabilities and premature deaths in this country.

Over the past few decades there has been significant change in technology within the trucking industry that has seen a reduction in the time employees have spent being physically active and an increase in sitting time.

Prolonged periods of sitting can be a major health issue for many in the trucking industry. Long periods of sitting can slow metabolism, affect the body's ability to regulate blood sugar, blood pressure and the breakdown of body fat. Sedentary behaviour is an independent risk factor for poor health, type two diabetes and a range of weight-related health conditions.

There are a number of significant benefits from having a healthy workforce:

- Healthy employees are less liable to be off work on sick leave or to have an accident. An employee who is fit and healthy is less likely to catch any bugs that may be going around. This in turn puts less pressure on employees covering for those who are absent.
- Healthy employees tend to have more energy. People who exercise regularly have increased and sustained energy throughout the day that helps them to stay focussed on the task, and helps them to apply their best efforts to the task at hand.
- Healthy employees usually have a higher level of self-confidence. They



have proven to themselves that they can be fit and healthy through their own efforts. This gives them the confidence to reach for higher levels of achievement in the workplace.

- Fit and healthy employees help to inspire confidence in others.
- Fit and healthy employees are more likely to take on leadership roles within your business.
- When you are fit and healthy it is easier to set and achieve your goals.
- Healthy employees tend to have a better attitude to life, and generally feel good about themselves. This results in more balanced employees with a positive attitude in the workplace.
- As a general rule, fit and healthy employees are less stressed. Regular exercise helps to reduce an individual's stress levels. Employees that exercise regularly have lower stress levels than employees that don't regularly exercise.
- Fit and healthy employees provide an opportunity to participate in team building activities like golf, mountain biking, hiking or participating in community-based projects like picking up rubbish from a children's playground. This helps to further improve workplace relationships and employee morale.
- Employers that demonstrate a concern for their employee's health and wellbeing tend to have better engagement with their employees.

The following steps will help you start your own workplace wellness programme:

- 1 Survey your employees. Find out what your employees need and would be of interest.
- 2 What type of lifestyle are your employees leading? Do they smoke or drink? Do they exercise regularly? Do they eat a healthy diet? Do they visit their Doctor regularly?
- 3 Offer a free health check-up, including blood pressure checks, cholesterol screening, smoking cessation programs, and free flu injection.
- 4 Communicate new health or wellness information each month. Offer free fruit and bottled water.
- 5 Encourage physical activity outside of work. Give them time of to compete in events, maybe even sponsor them.
- 6 Assist employees suffering from addiction or abuse.
- 7 Provide healthy incentives. A free pedometer is good idea as it encourages exercise.
- 8 Review the programme regularly to see what is working and what isn't. So where do you go for help with your business? There are a number of resources available that your business can access that will help you implement a workplace wellness programme:

- **Ministry of Health Guidance for Workplaces:** The Ministry of Health has very useful resources on their website providing healthy living Guidance for Workplaces.
- **Health Ed:** Health Ed is a catalogue of free health resources brought to you by the Health Promotion Agency (HPA) and the Ministry of Health.
- **Fit for the Road Programme:** This is an initiative of the Log Transport Safety Council, which aims to provide log truck drivers with information and resources that help them to make healthy lifestyle choices.
- **Trans-help Foundation:** Is a non-profit organisation based in Australia that provides safety and well-being support to the Australian Transport Industry. ■

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