



Celebrating 75 **GROUND BREAKING** years in 2018



Clockwise from top left: Safety professionals Robert Paige (Arnason Industries), Ray Bissonnette (Nelson River Construction), Jeff Love (Borland Construction) and Marc Rodrigue (Accurate HD).
PHOTOS BY DARCY FINLEY



INVESTING IN SAFETY PAYS OFF

— AND SPAWNS SUBSECTOR IN CONSTRUCTION

BY PAT ST. GERMAIN

Since the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association hired its first safety advisor in 1989, the focus on keeping workers healthy and whole has given rise to an entire industry subsector of specialists — trained professionals who are dedicated to ensuring safety is top of mind, every day.

“On a day-to-day basis, we strive to spot the hazard, assess the risk and find a safer way,” says Arnason Industries safety coordinator Robert Paige, whose career choice was motivated by personal experience.

“Twenty-five years ago, a friend lost his life trying to save a worker in a confined space. I made a promise to make a difference in the workplace because of that incident,” he says.

Paige completed his Construction Safety Officer (CSO) training at BCIT, and earned his National Construction Safety Officer (NCSO) designation through MHCA’s WORKSAFELY™ program, which requires candidates with at least three years of construction safety experience to complete a minimum of 12 industry-specific courses and write a national exam. Like many of his peers, Paige’s commitment to safety extends beyond his day job.

“I am a first aid instructor for Canadian Ski Patrol and volunteer almost every weekend in the winter, and also teach first aid for the Red Cross for workplace first aid courses. I instruct confined space, working at heights, respiratory protection programs, risk mitigation and I am a Licensed Industrial Audiometric Technician.”

Nelson River Construction safety, health and loss prevention manager Ray Bissonnette was completing his HR Management certificate at Red River College when RRC introduced a new accelerated Occupational Safety and Health program. He decided to enrol and soon launched a new career, working with the Construction Safety Association of Manitoba before joining Nelson River 11 years ago.

Since then, he’s earned his Canadian Registered Safety Professional (CRSP) certification and taken advantage of a multitude of MHCA WORKSAFELY training opportunities.

“I’ve pretty much gone through the whole gamut of MHCA courses over the years. They’ve all been useful — I’m a big proponent of training,” he says.

“A big part of it is not only the knowledge that I gain, but making sure our employees get the training they need. I always remind our employees, nobody ever kisses their family goodbye thinking it’s the last time they’re going to see them. Everybody should go home the same way they came to work and a big part of that is training.”

Bissonnette says all employees are encouraged to take responsibility for their own safety and for the safety of their co-workers. And he urges them to practice safety at home, too. First aid training is available to every employee, and Bissonnette does his best to motivate them to take advantage of it. In one instance, he casually asked an older worker who was reluctant to sign up if he had any grandchildren. As it turns out, the man enjoyed spending time fishing with his granddaughter.

“I said, ‘What would you do if she was having a hot dog and started choking and you didn’t know what to do?’ He signed up the next day.”

Creating personal connections is part of the job. It isn’t always easy to convince workers to wear all their personal protective equipment on a hot day, or follow safety protocols when they’ll only be operating a piece of machinery for a few minutes.

Borland Construction safety supervisor Jeff Love says that’s one reason why it’s important to nurture relationships with workers in the field.

“It helps to build that culture of safety within the organization,” Love says. “Once you build that culture and people are doing it on a day-to-day basis, that in turn helps Borland to lower our incident numbers and keep workers safe.”

A graduate of RRC’s Occupational Health and Safety program, Love did his practicum at Borland and was hired on immediately, starting out as a safety technician. Since then, he has earned NCSO, CRSP and Gold Seal Certified Construction Safety Coordinator designations.

For Love and others, maintaining the company’s COR™ (Certificate of Recognition) status is an achievement in itself.

COR-certified companies are required to conduct annual internal audits of safety training and procedures, and provide documentation to WORKSAFELY, which conducts an external audit every third year.

For some safety specialists, MHCA’s electronic documentation system, e-COR™, has become an indispensable tool.

Arnason’s Robert Paige says it allows him to upload and share new safety procedures with hundreds of workers in the blink of an eye, and maintain constant contact with more than 20 remote job sites.

“I can look at a hazard assessment for a location 600 kilometres away. I can approve a confined space entry within minutes of it being submitted and have recently started using a new feature that immediately notifies me when certain events happen, like an incident report,” he says.

“I can’t imagine being a safety manager without it,” he adds. “Almost all our sites are fly-in or ice road-only communities and the logistical challenge of a safety manager would be impossible without e-COR.”

Accurate HD safety coordinator Marc Rodrigue also relies on e-COR to help meet stringent documentation requirements. In 2017, Rodrigue received the MHCA WORKSAFELY safety leader award at the inaugural Safetys, presented in partnership with seven other provincial safety organizations.

Accurate HD has been COR-certified since 2012, largely thanks to Rodrigue’s diligence. He implemented the company’s safety program and is vigilant in ensuring that employees follow best practices and procedures, right down to inspecting electrical cords before they use any machinery.

Hazard assessments are conducted at every job site, every day. Even if workers have been on the same site for several days, Rodrigue says new hazards could crop up — anything from ice on a cold morning to the discovery of a wasp nest.

“It keeps everybody on their toes. They’re looking for hazards, they’re being a lot more careful,” he says. “Change is hard, but the guys are adapting to changing if it means it’s going to keep them safe.”

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