

The First Aid Association will expand its role in the industry.

At its annual meeting held Wednesday January 30th the Members of the Occupational First Aid Attendants' Association of BC decided to return to our roots as a First Aid Training Agency by preparing to offer training in safety and related skills.

Expansion into the niche area of construction safety training was seen as a logical extension for the Association as many of the safety officials in construction are First Aid Attendants.

Our Association was founded in 1931 by a dedicated group of First Aid professionals who advanced training and set the standards for the Province.

Occupational First Aid Attendants are the first responders at occupational work sites and recognize that the best form of First Aid is prevention. Members throughout the province have expressed how they are frequently appointed the guardians of work site safety, while lacking effective training and tools in this regard.

Employers find it difficult to maintain effective and consistent occupational safety programs due to high turn over in the industry and lack of people with effective safety training relevant to industry requirements and default to relying upon OFA's whether trained in relevant safety methods and systems or not.

Independent and smaller operations are very busy just managing their business and learning as they go. First Aid Attendants posted to these types of operations such as small drilling, logging, or construction operations are often faced with real dangers and managers with limited safety knowledge.

In keeping with our founding principles our Association is commencing a program of safety training that exceeds the current standards set for Construction Safety Officers in the City of Vancouver. A program to meet Provincial needs and designed to assist employers in effectively meeting their work safety requirements while maintaining a productive and cost effective work site and providing our Members with the training and tools they need to be effective and respected in their industry.

The program consists of training modules that can be narrowed to fit one industry or expanded to incorporate multiple industries. Modules are to allow students to acquire their training over an extended time frame cost effectively while developing credits towards a Provincially recognized Certificate rather than a Vancouver based program only.

Our Association is working with local and Provincial Authorities to establish the Provincial Standards and will be seeking regular input from Members on our Forum.

Members will directly benefit by guaranteed slots for courses, member rates, and financing not available to non-members.

The WCB and Occupational First Aid

Worksafe BC (the name of the Workers' Compensation Board of BC) had been reducing its statutory legislation and transferring the spirit, not always the wording, to the regulatory level, and the guideline/policy level. This process which started with the election of the Liberal government in 2001 has begun to reverse as the (predictable) consequences have begun to appear.

Citing the death of a logger on Vancouver Island, and the Coroner's Inquest which attributed the death, at least in part, to the inadequacy of First Aid availability at the time due to the relaxing of FA requirements, Worksafe BC has brought back the First Aid Regulations which had been removed. The old Regulations have returned almost intact, but no additional Regulations take effect February 1st.

Prior to the 2001 election a bipartisan committee of industry and labour had a series of recommendation for improvements in First Aid but the committee was dissolved by the WCB and none of these recommendations have been introduced.

Changes to the Regulations for Biological Agents have been introduced effective January 1st, which expand the breadth of precautions necessary (for First Aid Attendants and others) to more than bloodborne pathogens in the workplace.

This is a positive sign, since the WCB's work on bloodborne pathogen protocol which had started in the '90's did not seem to have progressed.

Worksafe has also take a step in the opposite direction: the revisions shift responsibility away from the employer to the medical practitioner for a risk of exposure decision and subsequent treatment responsibility. The employer's responsibility ends at advising the worker to seek immediate medical evaluation.

This change has been presented by Worksafe as a response to stakeholders. In this writer's opinion, this is not a good change.

Comments on these articles are invited.

The articles on this page have been written by Russ Brown and Allan Zdunich on behalf of the OFAAABC. If you would like information about the Association, please visit our website (www.ofaaa.bc.ca) featured in the Oct/Nov issue of CEN.