



Human Resources

by Robin Brunet

Tips to Minimize Two Costly Workplace Accidents

Accidents in pubs, bars, and lounges are inevitable. Even the most stringent precautions cannot prevent the occasional slip or sprain on the job. Unfortunately, these precautions are not always implemented to the degree they could be.

According to WorkSafeBC, two of the most significant injuries on licensed premises are due to overexertion and falling. From 2003 to 2007, overexertion injuries accounted for 20% of the compensation costs in the sector (more than \$1.2 million over the five-year period), while falls represented 17% and \$1.1 million. Such costs could be greatly reduced with basic forethought, explains Birgitta Ekberg-Daly, Human Resources Director for The Strathcona Hotel in Victoria. "Accident prevention isn't rocket science," she says. "What it takes is constant diligence and the willingness of management to try different strategies."

Located in downtown Victoria, the 64-year-old, family-owned establishment boasts seven separate facilities under one roof, including The Sticky Wicket Pub & Restaurant, Big Bad John's, Element, and The Clubhouse, which alone is Vancouver Island's largest nightclub. On a typical Saturday night, the Strathcona can welcome as many as 1,000 patrons, served by as many as 250 staff. But its owners, management, and staff have together taken proactive steps to make this a safe and enjoyable workplace.

Here are some of their simple strategies worth considering:

1. Foster a culture of safety

At the Strathcona, numerous safety initiatives have been tested, implemented, and fine-tuned under the watchful eyes of its owners, the brothers Grant, Kirk, and Craig Olson. Although the establishment has the financial wherewithal to implement ambitious ideas, Ekberg-Daly emphasizes that the real key to keeping staff and patrons safe has been the owners' mindset. "In an industry where safety records have been notoriously bad, the Olsons have fostered a culture of safety," she suggests. "They are very in tune with their business and staff, and they never stop thinking of how operations can be improved. Providing you have willing managers, it's not too difficult to 'raise the bar', because one has direct access to volumes of information from venues, such as Worksafe BC," she says. go2's new occupational health and safety division is also offering industry-specific health and safety resources on its website at www.go2hr.ca.

2. Hold regular meetings to review procedures

Augmenting current procedures and initiatives at the Strathcona is an ongoing focus in occupational health and safety (OH&S) training. "In accordance with Worksafe BC, we have monthly OH&S meetings where we mull over various issues and discuss preventative ideas and measures," describes Ekberg-Daly. "The participants in this committee are mainly front-end staff and me, which makes the buy-in from staff easier when implementing new safety procedures."



3. Anticipate how your customers behave

One of the main hazards the Strathcona wanted to address was the risk that either customers or staff could slip on the dance floor due to spilled drinks that patrons habitually took with them from the adjoining pub. Two solutions were developed, one simple, the other ambitious: "The simple solution was to instruct bussers and servers to mop up spills as quickly as possible," says Ekberg-Daly. "The slightly more ambitious solution was to install a surface upon the perimeter railing of our dance floor on which patrons could rest their drinks."

4. Consider switching from glass to plastic

Modern materials and design can prevent problems without sacrificing style. In order to minimize potential accidents due to broken beverage glasses, think of replacing your glassware with attractive, durable, washable, plastic containers. That's what the Olsons did after a trip to Las Vegas, where they saw how many clubs there had seamlessly made the switch.

5. Review staff uniforms and footwear

Loosely fitted uniforms that can catch on furniture, or footwear with inappropriate heels or soles can easily contribute to slips and falls. Many safety products for the hospitality sector can be found to suit varying needs and budgets. To reduce slippages for the Strathcona's kitchen staff, the Olsons subsidized the purchase of footwear. "We also invested in non-slip kitchen floor tiles," says Ekberg-Daly.

6. Encourage overall physical fitness

Staff who keep themselves in good shape are less likely to stumble unexpectedly or carry themselves in a careless manner. To that end, the Olsons subsidized gymnasium passes for their staff in the belief that physical fitness helps enhance workplace safety.

Robin Brunet is writing for go2. For more information for using human resources to improve your business' bottom line, visit www.go2hr.ca.