

BACK TO OUR FUTURE



By Collin Pullar, President, Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association

The Saskatchewan building construction industry can look back over the past year with a sense of accomplishment. Throughout the year, I've tried to put into context the type of progress we have experienced in the past 15 years.

One of my audiences more recently was a group of professional procurement officers (I like to call them professional shoppers). I explained how payroll for all building construction industry codes was just over \$407 million in the year 2000 and grew to \$550 million five years later. Then things intensified in Saskatchewan, where payroll climbed to \$1.3 billion in 2010, and for this past year alone, all forecasts show payroll will exceed \$2.25 billion! The construction industry in Saskatchewan is clearly experiencing a new normal where an ongoing need for skilled labour and effective leadership will be needed for a number of years to come.

With this drastic increase in payroll, I've also tried to put into context the type of progress the industry has made in terms of reducing the number and severity of workplace injuries. This has had a tremendous impact on the economic viability of the industry today, not to mention the added pressure of training, recruiting, and maintaining a qualified workforce. This year, for example, it's projected that the construction industry can expect to pay about \$53 million in Workers' Compensation Board premiums. This is quite a chunk of change; however, it pales in comparison to the upwards of \$269 million that would be paid out if rates had remained as they were 15 or 20 years ago.

I say all this to emphasize that it has been you that has made these improvements and it is you that is continuing to make a difference on a daily basis. This year the Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association

(SCSA) celebrated 20 years of industry-driven commitment to safety as an association. In conjunction with this very special celebration, the association hosted an evening of honour gala to formally recognize 20 notable leaders in the construction industry who have literally made it their life's work to make a serious impact on peoples' lives, and as a by-product, a much more competitive Saskatchewan.

These people were pioneers at a time when safety was like a foreign language on most worksites. They made significant personal and professional sacrifices to ensure that a strong safety resource – the SCSA – would be available to current and future workers in this province. While thousands and thousands of Saskatchewan construction workers and companies have benefited from their vision for the industry, many of these heroes claim to be most excited about the future of what safety could bring in terms of making sure folks are going home intact.

The business environment today suggests that we have to continue to improve our skills in assisting a greater number of companies to adopt and successfully implement safety management systems. Incorporating stronger elements of leadership and employee engagement through the

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Certificate of Recognition (COR™) program will be part of how we ensure greater success in reducing injuries and increasing productivity in the future. To support improved business and worker mobility across borders, the SCSA will continue its work with other provincial/territorial construction safety associations with respect to the National Construction Safety Officer (NCSO) and COR™ safety certification programs.

The most significant successes we will have, though, will be because of, and through partnering with, others who have common interest in seeing a safe, strong, and productive labour force. Working with provincial bodies such as Labour Relations and Workplace Safety (on targeted initiatives), Workers' Compensation Board, local construction associations, the building trades offices, and others will be the way we are able to encourage policies, open doors, and see changed behaviors in the future.

To improve our service to companies we serve, we have opened a new Saskatoon office that will pool our services under one roof, bringing an improved experience to our members and clients. We believe that raising our game in 2016 will help raise awareness, bring knowledge, new skills, and, ultimately, an improved workforce for companies that are bound to see the value safety brings us all as the positive trends continue. ■

Collin Pullar is the President of the Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association – an industry-driven and funded enterprise with over 9,000 member companies in Saskatchewan. Its mission is to provide high-quality safety training and advice to construction employers and employees that will lead to reduced human and financial losses associated with injuries.

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