

2016 OHS Inspections Show Improved Compliance on Saskatchewan Construction Sites



The Saskatoon and Region Home Builders' Association (SRHBA), the Saskatoon Land Development Branch, WorkSafe Saskatchewan, and the Saskatchewan Construction Safety Association (SCSA) are reminding home builders and renovators to cover unguarded openings on worksites and to wear proper personal protective equipment.

In July of 2016, the Saskatoon City Council revised their policy on Residential Lot Sales, requiring homebuilders to complete mandatory builder training and safety certification in order to qualify for purchasing city-owned lots. Frank Long, Director of Saskatoon Land, believes the new criteria will help improve safety records in the residential sector. "Safety is a priority for the City of Saskatoon. Ensuring our builders and their trades are aware of and committed to safety in the work place will result in fewer injuries and job interruptions. This dedication to continuous improvement benefits the entire industry," says Long.

Chris Guérette, CEO of the Saskatoon & Region Home Builders' Association, echoes the importance of proper safety certification and practices in Saskatoon's home building industry, which is why the SRHBA has included safety training as a requirement in their Certified Professional Home Builder Program. "When contractors are committed to the safety of their workers, everyone benefits. Consumers should be looking for professionals who have taken the time to undergo proper safety training — not only does it protect their investment, but it shows that the company values the safety of their workers and has put a real effort into preventing costly, and sometimes tragic, preventable incidents. I would encourage consumers to ask specifically about safety certification when they're choosing a contractor, and to question the companies who have opted not to complete their safety training about why they made that choice," says Guérette.

Each year, the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Division of the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety (LRWS) conducts safety compliance inspections on nearly 170 residential construction sites throughout Saskatchewan.

Despite safety improvements in these areas, results from the 2016 inspections also showed a decrease in the rate of compliance with regulations for both uncovered openings in floors and building shafts as well as safe means of entering and exiting a building. In 2016, observed openings were at 30 per cent compared to 43 per cent in the year previous. Safe means of entering and exiting a building fell from 88 per cent in 2015 to 75 per cent in 2016.

Highlights from 2016 OHS Inspections

- The average compliance rate increased from 70 per cent in 2015 up to 75 per cent in 2016;
- The percentage of workers wearing protective headwear increased from 49 per cent in 2015 to 60 per cent in 2016;
- Workers trained in a fall protection plan jumped from 54 per cent in 2015 up to 74 per cent in 2016; and
- The rate of workers trained in the use of a fall protection system increased from 69 per cent in 2015 to 88 per cent in 2016, while those observed using the fall protection system moved from 45 per cent up to 64 per cent.

The rate of workers adhering to regulations for shafts without barriers also dropped to a low nine per cent from 18 per cent.

"We are definitely happy to see an improvement to safety practices with regard to fall protection and other protective equipment that is often a worker's last line of defence against an injury or worse," says SCSA President, Collin Pullar.

"More work needs to be done to ensure senior leaders are taking the safety of their workers seriously. Workers also need to adopt the mentality of controlling and eliminating hazards on site; this starts from the top," added Pullar.

According to the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board (WCB), seven of the 31 fatalities recorded in 2016 occurred in the building construction sector.

"This improved compliance is still not a good news story," says Shelly McFadden, the WCB's Director of Prevention. "An improvement to a 60 per cent compliance rate means only 60 per cent of workers were wearing hard hats on the worksites that were inspected. A compliance rate of 64 per cent for wearing fall arrest where it is required is not acceptable. These should be zero-tolerance rules for supervisors to enforce. There should be 100 per cent compliance with wearing protective equipment. That is the law. Safe practice will save lives."

According to the 2016 WCB Annual Report, Construction trades helpers and labourers had the third-highest number of total claims accepted in the province (885 claims).