

# Mini Conferences -- Reminder and Update!

**May 2003**

As mentioned in April's Safety News, we are offering Regional Mini Conferences again this year. The idea is to discuss issues of interest to municipal managers and health and safety coordinators. The conferences are being organized as follows:

- Canmore: Thursday May 22, 2003
- Sturgeon County: July (exact date to be confirmed)
- MD Greenview: Thursday October 16, 2003

Thanks very much to these municipalities for offering to host!

The agenda will include:

- updates from Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Workers' Compensation Board and Alberta Municipal Health and Safety Association
- presentation on risk management - how it compares and contrasts with a health and safety management system
- presentation by the City of Red Deer on their health and safety management system
- round table discussion by delegates about issues (good and bad) in their municipality

The sessions are free of charge and include refreshments and lunch, however pre-registration is required. Please contact Lorraine at AMHSA to register, at 955-3701 or 1-800-267-9764.

## North American Occupational Safety and Health Week, May 4 - 10, 2003

Occupational Safety and Health week is recognized across North America every year in May. The purpose of this week to raise awareness among employers, managers, workers and the public about the importance of workplace health and safety, and the importance of preventing injury and illness in the workplace. This year's theme is "Prepare Young Workers for the Future" and takes place May 4 - 10. Events are being organized in different locations throughout Alberta.

This week is an excellent opportunity for your municipality to reinforce its commitment to workplace health and safety by:

- declaring NAOSH week by your mayor or reeve
- having displays at the municipal administration building, shopping malls, etc
- offering employee recognition events
- preparing posters, newsletters, articles, etc

## Heads Up - 2003

The Workers' Compensation Board's popular **Head's Up** campaign has four new posters for 2003. If you would like any of these posters, contact the Board at (780) 498-3999. We also have a limited stock of some of them.

## Cell Phone Use while Driving

(with thanks to DuPont Safety Resources)

In the United States there have been a number of court settlements and fines imposed against employers whose employees are involved in collisions while talking on a cell phone. This problem has prompted one human resources association to recommend that employers develop a corporate cell phone use policy. Policies could include statements such as:

- employees issued a business cell phone and required to drive on the job are expected to refrain from using their cell phone while driving
- employees pull over and stop before placing or accepting a call or are provided with hands-free equipment

Note that there is still considerable debate about the use of hands-free equipment. Experts believe that there basically 3 kinds of driving distractions: visual, mechanical, cognitive.

- An example of a **visual distraction** is looking away from the road and traffic, to observe the scenery or look for the ringing phone.
- **Mechanical distractions** mean trying to do something else at the same time, for example, dial the phone or find a new station on the radio.
- **Cognitive distractions** deal with situations when the brain is no longer focused on the task of driving, because of being lost in thought, or in a phone conversation.

It is widely agreed that cell phone use causes visual and mechanical distractions for drivers, which is why hands-free systems are recommended. But some experts believe that cell phones also cause a cognitive distraction, and therefore cell phones should not be used at all while driving.

This topic is also causing lots of debate and discussion in Alberta, and in Canada as a whole. And several countries around the world have introduced legislation on this topic, ranging from hands-free only to outright bans. Regardless of the legislation, or lack of, it is important for organizations to look at the activity of using a cell phone while driving, and perform a hazard assessment, just as they would with any other potential hazard. Of course whatever decisions are made based on that hazard assessment must be shared with all workers and must be enforced.

Remember, there was a time, not too long ago when we did not have cell phones - people left messages, and we called them back when we were able. Was that so bad?