

July 2005

Good News From WCB...

WCB Announces its Forecasted 2006 Industry Premium Rates

The WCB has just released its forecast for premium rates in 2006. The rates for all industries in the municipal sector are anticipated to down by over 10%. Rates are forecast as follows:

Industry	2005 Rate	2006 Rate	Difference
Cities	\$1.41	\$1.22	- 13.4%
Municipal Districts & Counties	\$1.68	\$1.43	- 14.7%
Towns	\$1.42	\$1.23	- 13.3%
Villages	\$1.42	\$1.23	- 13.3%

Cell Phone Use and Driving Don't Mix

Just in case you're not convinced, here is more research suggesting that cell phones should not be used when driving. The latest study found that drivers who talk on cell phones are less likely to see what's going on around them and slower to react when they do see it. Researchers at the University of Utah put drivers in a driving simulator and compared their reactions to a braking car in front of them. When talking on the cell phone to a research assistant, the drivers were slower to brake and took longer to get back up to driving speed after braking. Average braking times were 17% slower than when not talking on the phone. In addition, the cell phone users were twice as likely to rear end the vehicle in front of them. And the reason has nothing to do with fumbling with the phone - all simulations were done with a hands-free phone.

The same researchers previously compared the responses of drivers talking on regular cell phones to those talking on hands-free phones, and found that there was no significant difference in their response to traffic signals. The researchers dubbed the impaired response "inattention blindness" - drivers may be gazing at objects in front of them, but don't actually *see* them because their attention is directed towards their phone conversation.

Hantavirus Alert

Alberta Health and Wellness has found high rates of hantavirus in deer mice in Central Alberta. Approximately 1/2 of the deer mice tested in the Hobbema area and 1/3 of the deer mice tested in the Wetaskiwin area were infected. In addition there is a high population of deer mice in the Hobbema area this year.

If a person is infected with hantavirus, the disease appears within one to five weeks of contact. Initial symptoms resemble the flu, including fever, body aches, and abdominal problems. But if hantavirus is

involved, this can progress to severe difficulty breathing. Anyone who develops breathing problems and has recently been in an area contaminated by rodents should see a doctor immediately.

Precautions to be taken when working in contaminated areas include:

- The most effective precaution against infection is to keep rodents out of homes and work areas, and immediately trap any that get in
- When cleaning disturb mouse droppings and nesting material as little as possible
- Wear rubber gloves to handle the droppings; rinse the gloves in disinfectant (such as bleach solution) before taking them off
- Soak droppings with disinfectant before mopping them up
- Dispose of waste material in a sealed bag and bury it, or put it out for removal in sealed bags, in garbage cans with tight-fitting lids
- Do not sweep or use a vacuum cleaner to remove droppings - this will just make the material airborne
- People who are likely to be exposed to high levels of contamination or in spaces with little ventilation should wear respirators

For more information, visit the Alberta Health and Wellness website at www.health.gov.ab.ca

Back Pain - Don't Take it Lying Down!

This is the title of a new education campaign being promoted by the WCB. In the old days people suffering from back pain were often prescribed bed rest as a way to treat their pain. Today health care professionals believe that being active is the key to getting better faster. In 2004, claims for back pain made up over 25% of all the lost time claims reported to the WCB. That translates into almost 9,000 claims which cost nearly \$14 million. As part of their education program the WCB has created a series of audio and print materials. For more information, go to their website at www.wcb.ab.ca and click on the *back@it* link.

Non-scents in the Workplace

More and more people are finding that perfumes and colognes are making them nauseous, giving them headaches, or causing irritation to their nose and sinuses. The problem isn't generally the smell itself, but the chemicals used to create the smell. Perfume manufacturing is basically a chemical manufacturing process, using many industrial solvents and artificial odorants. To make things worse, there has been a steep increase over the past decade in the number of people with asthma; almost 75% of asthmatics are hypersensitive to fragrances, and can have serious reactions in overly fragranced environments. Even if not asthmatic, many people develop headaches in these environments. Headaches - including those caused by exposure to these scents - are one of the most significant causes of lost time and lost productivity.

To read more about the issue of scents in the workplace, go to the Canadian Lung Association's web site at www.lung.ca and search for "scents".