

January 2006

The text "HAPPY NEW YEAR" is written in a bold, red, blocky font with a black outline. It is slanted upwards from left to right. Three yellow starburst graphics are placed around the text: one above the 'Y' in 'YEAR', one below the 'H' in 'HAPPY', and one to the right of the 'Y' in 'YEAR'.

Jim, Susan, Rose Ann and Lorraine would like to take this time to wish all of our members a prosperous and healthy 2006. We hope that this new year brings joy and blessings to you all.

## Spring Schedule Available

You should have received a copy of our spring course schedule by now. All of our courses will be offered in Stony Plain and Cochrane; if we have enough interest in a course, it will run. Note that we have to make a decision about whether or not a course will run at least 10 days before the actual course date. So please register early! If you haven't seen a copy of the schedule either call Lorraine at 1-800-267-9764, or go onto our website at [www.amhsa.net](http://www.amhsa.net) and click on the spring schedule.

If you would like us to come to you instead, that can be arranged. There are no additional costs to a municipality that wants to have us go to them (i.e. we cover our travel costs ourselves). However we ask that you have at least 10 people in the class. Give Lorraine a call if you would like to find out more about this option.

## Good Byes

Rose Ann McGinty will be leaving our Association on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006 to work with the Provincial Government. Her 7 years of dedication and commitment to AMHSA combined with her skills and talents have not gone unnoticed by others. I expect she will flourish in the new challenges that she has accepted. Her departure will be deeply felt by all of us at AMHSA and of course we wish her the very best in her new job opportunity.

**Jim Moroney**, Executive Director

I have had a great time working at AMHSA, with my fellow employees and our board of directors. I've learned lots working here and met some great people. There are a lot of wonderful people working in the municipal sector; I will miss the people that I've had the opportunity to work with over the years. But after 7 years, it is time to try something new. So I am going to work for Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Workplace Initiatives and Continuous Improvement. In my new role I will be working with various groups to help develop industry best practices in health and safety. I hope to be able

to continue to stay in touch with you at my new job.

Thanks for all your support and friendship over the years, **Rose Ann**

## Health and Safety in the Office

At AMHSA we often get questions about the relevance of health and safety management systems in an office environment. Office staff might not operate heavy equipment, or work in trenches, but they have their fair share of issues too. The types of hazards are different than for outside workers, but are no less real or significant. Office employees can face issues related to

- poor lighting
- working in static and/or awkward postures
- inadequate space, which can lead to tripping hazards, blocked exits, etc
- poor air quality
- workplace stress, which can escalate into violence

A hazard assessment should be conducted for the activities that office employees perform. This means taking a serious look at each activity, and asking "what could go wrong when performing this task, or providing this service". The hazards could cause injury immediately (e.g. tripping down a flight of stairs) or after a period of months or years (e.g. a repetitive strain injury after years of data entry work). We generally talk about 4 categories of hazards:

- physical: slips, trips, falls; caught in machinery; over-exertion from heavy lifting; over-use from repetitive tasks); etc
- chemical: cleaning chemicals, solvents, glues
- biological: moulds, fungi, bacteria and viruses - can include moulds in buildings, contamination of water systems, exposure to disease from other humans or animals
- psychosocial: stress, fatigue, violence

When activities (or services provided) are assessed for their hazards, consider if the activity could expose an employee to hazards from any of these four categories. It's important to recognize that municipal employees do not work in isolation, and that sometimes the hazards can arise as a result of an employee's interaction with the public.

Once hazards have been assessed, they need to be eliminated or minimized to an acceptable level of risk. As well, all employees need to understand the potential hazards, and the proper procedures to minimize their risk. And then periodic inspections of the office environment should be conducted to ensure no new hazards crop up, and time should be set aside during staff meetings to discuss any health and safety concerns that employees have.

If organizations take the time and effort to focus on the issues and hazards that are relevant for office staff, all employees will see the significance of a health and safety management system for themselves.

AMHSA offers two courses that might be of interest to office staff:

- Musculoskeletal Injury Prevention Program (MIPP): this course addresses the risk factors associated with musculoskeletal injuries, typical types of injuries and their symptoms, and ways to solve the problems. This spring we are offering this course as two half day sessions: **1/2 day for**

**outside workers**, and those in "physically demanding environments"; a second **1/2 day for those who work in an office environment**. By offering two separate sessions we hope to be able to tailor the material to the different needs of each group.

- **Workplace Violence Prevention:** the OH&S Code defines violence as the "threatened, attempted or actual conduct of a person that causes or is likely to cause physical injury". The violence can arise at work, or because of work, and is not limited to violence between employees; it can include violent behaviours by the public towards employees. This course teaches participants to recognize warning signs of violence and strategies to deal with a violent individual.

## **Workplace Violence - Inspection Form**

While on the topic of workplace violence, the Education Safety Association of Ontario has created a "Workplace Hazards Inspection Form - Workplace Violence". This 7 page inspection form helps individuals focus their attention on concerns about security and violence threats. Although this form was created for an educational environment, much of it is applicable to a municipal workplace. For a copy of this form go to: [http://www.esao.on.ca/downloads/checklist\\_pdfs/violence\\_inspection.pdf](http://www.esao.on.ca/downloads/checklist_pdfs/violence_inspection.pdf)

The association has a number of other forms and checklists related to health and safety, so it is worth visiting their website.