

Cross-section of industries benefit from CDMPs



Alberta oil sands spur regional growth and DM challenges in Wood Buffalo

When it comes to jobs, the advice to “go west” makes perfect sense if the destination is Alberta’s vast oil sands. The western-most prairie province’s three major oil sands cover more than 140,000 square kilometers, with the province’s largest deposit found at the Athabasca Tar Sands, a major reason why the surrounding regional municipality of Wood Buffalo is among the fastest growing industrial areas in Canada.

In 2004, the Alberta electoral districts of Fort McMurray and Athabasca-Wabasca were amalgamated and the new Wood Buffalo electoral district has since become the most highly populous in the province. Newly designated CDMP Kelly Smith, who is HR Advisor in the Benefits and Disability Management section of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo’s HR Department, has seen this growth first hand as the organization prepares to add another 96 temporary summer student employees to its staff of 700. Overall, the regional municipality is recruiting to fill 250 new positions.

Smith led creation of the regional municipality’s return to work program, which has now been in practice for over two years. She takes an advisory and coaching role in assisting supervisors and managers, many of whom are feeling the pressures of Wood Buffalo’s fast expansion. The return to work program was challenged over the last five years with a loss of physicians in the remote community, a problem Smith helped solve by recruiting CBI Health, which now provides occupational injury management services for the municipality’s employees. The fact that the WCB is located in Edmonton means the lack of local WCB resources for disabled employees adds more pressure to the return to work process.

Fortunately, Smith says the majority of WCB claims do not involve lost-time, and for those that do, she finds there is good acceptance and support from the union, which takes an active role in solutions for difficult long-term disability cases.

Overall, Smith credits certification for giving her more skills and creative approaches in handling her job, “I have more confidence in the process. Others have more confidence when looking to me for advice. A lot of employees are asking more questions and want to understand the process more.”



Smith adds that the program gave her more understanding of return to work legislation, human rights and where to find answers, and also “ideas on how to get buy-in from management.”

While awareness of the CDMP designation is still growing in Canada, Smith is enthusiastic about certification. “I would take it over a degree,” she says. “I tell people about certification – to go for it. It gives you real information and everyday situations. You are dealing with the now, not the history, and communicating with others doing the same thing.” In the future, Smith plans to go for two more designations valued in her position: Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) and Certified Employee Benefits Specialist (CEBS).

International designation motivates Saskatchewan Voc Rehab Specialist

Sandy Bartlett has spent 13 years at the Workers’ Compensation Board of Saskatchewan where she started as a case manager, working as a liaison in early intervention in the physiotherapy unit. Seven years ago she became a vocational rehabilitation specialist at the WCB and is now a Registered Vocational Professional (RVP), the designation granted by the Canadian Assessment, Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Society (CAVEWAS). Last year, she added CDMP (Certified Disability Management Professional) to her credentials.

“NIDMAR is recognized internationally and that has draw and appeal,” she advises. “I liked the idea of that option and it’s nice to know that your credentials will stand up elsewhere, even close by in the U.S.”

Bartlett works primarily with clients with permanent injuries and is involved with return to work planning that often means everything from “working with what they have, to a change in career, to retooling a skill set.”

She believes vocational rehabilitation and disability management are not fully understood, but being certified helps.

“Disability management is a little bit new. It is recognized in physiotherapy where it is better understood and there are closer parallels.” She adds that disability management as a specialty is also better recognized internationally than it is in Canada, where she sees there are still two philosophies struggling internally within the DM field: those that put client needs above all else and other approaches that consider the financial bottom line the priority.

“The education courses cover a great spectrum of topics with a lot of real, useful and practical information. It’s nice to have the



courses to fall back on. It's a continuous process to apply all the training." Despite that, Smith says she has seen good progress in the field and is confident that an understanding of disability management will change over time.

"The fact is, the designation gives you credibility when negotiating with employers and clients that your background is in this field and you do have some knowledge and credentials. You are able to justify your position based on a sound background."

Manitoba CDMP focuses on meaningful return to work

The first mine shaft was sunk in Thompson, Manitoba, 500 miles north of Winnipeg, in 1958. Now, mining and mineral industries, worth a record \$2.6 billion to the province of Manitoba in 2006, are second only to agriculture in the economy of Canada's eastern-most prairie province.

Dennis Pearce, CDMP, WCB Administrator in the Safe Production Training Centre of Vale Inco Limited has seen "the price of metals go through the roof" in the 22 years he has been with the company. Vale Inco is the largest nickel mining and metals manufacturing company in Canada, employing 1,600 people in its underground mines, mills, smelter and refineries.

Starting out in the accounting department in 1986, by the 1990s, Pearce had transferred to the HR Department with the desire to work in the "people side of the business." In 2005, he took over the disability management program at Vale. The company sees a high volume of minor injuries, including cuts, scrapes, bruises and punctures, but Pearce advises there are also a significant portion of repetitive injuries to backs, wrists and elbows in the refinery where he explains Vale is "trying to go to robotics and other means to cut down the exposure."

Pearce says he became interested in the CDMP designation when a HR advisor handed him a NIDMAR brochure, "I looked at it, and decided it was ideal for me."

He completed the program in about one year. "The skills and abilities I gained over the course made me better able to sit down with nurse practitioners, doctors and supervisors, and I can explain the client situation better. I've put in more procedures and processes to help people get the assistance they need."

Vale's disability management program has come a long way. As Pearce recalls, "We had a skeleton-type plan with a stated commitment to getting people back to work, but it was geared to getting people off WCB rolls and reducing experience costs."



After Pearce came on board with the DM program, he was joined by a company vice-president, two members of the union executive, a manager from health and productivity consulting firm Shepell.fgi, and a nurse practitioner. Together they formed a disability management program over the course of a year and it was instituted last spring. The enthusiastic committee quickly sought IDMSC certification by commissioning a Consensus Based Disability Management Audit through Certified CBDMA Auditor Dr. Garry Corbett, CDMP, based in Winnipeg.

“We were a hair’s breadth away from becoming certified,” says Pearce. “Now that our education piece is being rolled out, the next time Garry comes up to conduct an audit, we’re sure we’ll meet the standard,” promises Pearce.

Pearce is planning this spring, together with the company’s superintendent of safety, to take information out to the crews and the mines to explain how to report injuries, how to get assistance as early as possible and how to safely come back to work.

Although he has experienced some push back at the floor level and has to answer “why can’t they recuperate at home” when it becomes extra work to find jobs to accommodate employees off with injuries, Pearce emphasizes the company wants people back to work, not just because of WCB costs, but for “their own benefit health-wise and for our productivity.”

Most importantly, everyone involved in the return to work process at Vale agrees accommodating injured workers should “not be just counting paper clips”, says Pearce. “It must be meaningful work and that might involve training to find jobs that are useful and challenging.”

Becoming a CDMP has given him more tools than ever before to handle getting injured and ill employees at Vale back into meaningful jobs. “I had worked in human resources, compensation and accounting, and the more I could gain as far as disability management knowledge and how to work with individuals in that situation, the better I can do my job.”

May 28 date for the 2008 certification examinations

The 2008 certification examinations will be held on May 28 at various locations across Canada.

For further details, please check the website at: www.nidmar.ca or contact NIDMAR at:

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