

GROWING YOUR BUSINESS: HOW ONE LANDSCAPING FIRM TOOK HEALTH & SAFETY TO THE NEXT LEVEL



Small Business SUCCESS STORY

Every spring, DeKorte's Landscaping doubles its workforce, hiring seasonal workers to supplement its permanent roster of about 15 employees. Any small business with seasonal workers will recognize the resulting challenges: how to bring these newcomers up to speed, and keep them and their co-workers safe during the busiest time of the year.

DeKorte's has built a reputation throughout the Niagara Region for creating inspired outdoor living areas. But discerning customers expect more than inspiration. They also want projects completed on time and on budget.

As the business grew, the owners felt they needed a more robust health and safety program. "We weren't exactly sure what the program needed," says Joanne DeKorte, "but we knew we wanted it to be thorough."

DeKorte's called Workplace Safety & Prevention Services (WSPS) consultant Kristin Hoffman. "She had already been updating us on regulatory changes and industry best practices, which made it easy for us to talk with her."

Why focus on health and safety? "DeKorte's understands that it goes hand in hand with efficiency, productivity and customer service," says Hoffman. "This keeps the business healthy and helps it grow."

Establishing a solid foundation

"In March 2012," explains Hoffman, "we conducted a hazard assessment, identifying and prioritizing office, shop, yard, and offsite activities that could cause injuries, illnesses or property damage."

Hoffman and DeKorte's used the results to develop safe operating procedures and revamp the firm's health and safety manual.

Having put comprehensive policies and procedures in place, DeKorte's now focused on how workers applied them. At this stage, success or failure comes down to training.



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Putting health and safety into practice: 3 training tips

With a succession of different projects on the books and only so much time to get them done, there's no room for errors or injuries. DeKorte's applied these three safety tips to keep staff safe and productive:

- 1. Deliver orientation training before the busy season begins.** "Many employers have a narrow window in which they can hire workers, train them, and get them onto the floor," says Hoffman. "But orientation is a worthwhile investment because it helps establish a standard of performance before that first interaction with co-workers and customers. Be thorough. The stronger this first step, the greater success you'll have with all your subsequent training."
- 2. Provide orientation training to everyone.** This ensures all workers understand their roles and responsibilities, as well as the employer's health and safety policy, practices, and performance expectations. It also helps establish a team environment in which everyone works towards the same goals.
- 3. Train and coaching continuously.** Orientation is just the start. Ongoing efforts keep the training fresh, reinforce key messages, and encourage employees to keep health and safety top of mind. At DeKorte's this took the form of tool training, on-the-job training, toolbox talks, and ongoing coaching and reinforcement.

"Jobsite variables make it important to review safety precautions with our employees every day," says Joanne DeKorte. "You can never let your guard down. It can be hard to find time during busy season, but having policies that work and the templates and paperwork to back them up it truly help."

"What DeKorte's has done," says Hoffman, "is effect a cultural shift. They've made safety everybody's responsibility. It's integrated into how work is done."

Hoffman captures the shift with this example: "In the time I've worked with DeKorte's, their health and safety questions have changed from 'Can you implement this for us?' to 'How can we implement this requirement most effectively?' This proactivity reflects a business-wide approach to managing growth."

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