



Supervising in 2011 Means More Than Wearing the Hat and a Pay Raise

Terry Piche, Technical Director, Ontario Recreation Facilities Association Inc.

Somewhere in the workplace today a worker is not using a seat belt; is talking on a hand held device while driving or; is not wearing all appropriate safety wear. Each example has accountability if the worker is caught by a governing authority. Failing to properly train workplace supervisors has the same accountability. Today's workplaces are obligated to clearly define and evaluate their supervisory needs. The definition or sanction of such individuals cannot come from the Human Resources Department nor, does it have any connection to compensation or benefit packages. Supervisory obligations are clearly defined in the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) as: "a person who has charge of a workplace or authority over a worker."

In my observations, park and green-space operations often break their workforce into teams. Each is given a vehicle, a variety of equipment and set tasks to be completed throughout the work day. This work directive is usually completed by the recognized operational supervisor or manager. Each team is then sent on their way, often not in contact with the original operational supervisor or manager for the rest of the day.

The person who is by default leading the team in the field is accepting supervisory responsibilities for both themselves and those under their watch. At this point, the suggested "point person" throws up their hands and states, "this is not my job"! They identify that they are not listed as a supervisor, nor are they compensated for such responsibility. As much as they may wish to side step this workplace obligation, the fact is, should an accident occur, they

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will be caught in the backdraft of an investigation with their primary defence being, "I didn't know it was my responsibility"! Regrettably, "not knowing" is an unacceptable legal defence to accountability.

Remember, to meet basic acceptable training standards the session must include written materials and a testing mechanism. Merely explaining your workplace culture is not enough!

Selecting a supervisor in any work environment must be done carefully with some logic and supervisory competency must be trackable. The common past practice of promotion to workplace supervisor based solely on seniority or age needs to be re-evaluated. The basic supervisory requirements to be considered in meeting the definition of a “competent person” are defined in the OHSA as being:

- Qualified because of knowledge, training and experience to organize the work and its performance,
- Familiar with the OHSA and the regulations that apply to the work, and
- Has knowledge of any potential or actual danger to health or safety in the workplace (personne compétente).

Consider the team we defined earlier and now take a look at the person who by default (let’s call them supervisor) is in charge of the unit (because this is his/her second summer) and answer these basic questions to their competency:

- What level of knowledge does the supervisor have in respect to internal policies and procedures?
- Has the supervisor received “supervisory” training?
- What level of training has he/she received on the tools and equipment that are to be used?
- Is the supervisor’s 1-year of previous workplace experience adequate for him/her to provide leadership?
- Is the supervisor aware of the OHSA and how it is applied? Is he/she up-to-date on other legislation that may be applied as they go about their other duties (i.e. CSA Standard for Children’s Playspaces & Equipment)?
- Has the supervisor been updated on previous health and safety issues in the workplace?

One of Ontario’s Ministry of Labour (MOL) inspection objectives is workplace supervisor competence. The MOL believes that the basic supervisory abilities

must percolate down from the top of each organization. Failure to properly train workplace supervisors, or not provide adequate worker supervision, will result in fines and or incarceration for extreme circumstance.

Remember, to meet basic acceptable training standards the session must include written materials and a testing mechanism. Merely bringing someone aside and explaining your workplace culture and expectations will not suffice! ORFA, a Parks and Open Space Alliance partner, offers supervisory training workshops to help you meet your supervisory competency training objectives. Please feel free to reach me at tpiche@orfa.com or 416.426.7062 should you wish to investigate this training opportunity further.

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