

# Workplace Wellness

*a healthy workplace is a great investment*

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This issue of Workplace Wellness is brought to you by York Region Health Services. It is available to any workplace in York Region. We encourage you to copy and distribute this newsletter. Our team of health professionals offers information and education on workplace wellness issues at no charge!

## Healthy Environment, Healthy Community: Are You Doing Your Part?

It's a sign of the times. Our conversation with friends, family and co-workers is dotted with references to climate change, the environment and pollution. News and media continue to alert us to the impact our lifestyle and energy use have on the environment and our health.

Recent polls suggest Canadians are not only more concerned about global warming and protecting the environment than in past years, but the majority surveyed is willing to move beyond talk to action. Canadian research suggests that there is growing evidence of health risks due to climate change including: temperature-related illnesses, vector-borne diseases, effects of water and food contamination, air pollution health effects, extreme weather events, and social and economic changes. We can slow the effects of climate change by reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and dependence on fossil fuels.

Air pollution has been labeled by the Ontario Medical Association as a public health crisis. In the GTA, air pollution is primarily caused by vehicle emissions, home and business energy use, and industrial emissions. Each year in York Region we experience periods of poor air quality that can cause the quality of the air we breathe to fall well below acceptable standards.

### Why is air pollution in the GTA a health concern for all of us?

- More people die or are admitted to hospital for heart and lung problems on days with elevated levels of air pollution
- Health effects are found at levels previously thought to be safe
- People do not live as long in cities with high air pollution
- Air pollution may contribute to the development of lung cancer and chronic lung disease

Striving for cleaner air is a priority for York Region. Several initiatives are making a difference in our community and beyond. These include:

- Corporate Clean Air Task Force activities to identify potential initiatives to reduce emissions from regional activities and operations in energy use, purchasing practices, transportation fleets, transportation and land use planning and greening initiatives

- Participating in the annual Smog Summit events
- Educating the public in regards to Anti-Idling Awareness, Smog Alerts, Forest Awareness, and the Active and Safe Routes to School Program
- Partnering with other Public Health Units in the GTA to promote the "20/20 The Way to Clean Air" program in schools, workplaces and in the community. By using the 20/20 planner guide you can help the environment and save money by reducing your energy use at home and on the road by 20%

A number of clean air actions and recommendations identified in "York Region's State of the Environment Report 2005" highlight the Region's goals and give rise to a leadership opportunity in the community – to encourage actions to protect and enhance the environment by those who live, work and/or play in York Region. Organizations interested in contributing to an environmentally healthy community can access a variety of programs through the York Region Greening Strategy. For more information visit: [www.york.ca/Services/Environmental/Greening+Strategy/default+greening+strategy.htm](http://www.york.ca/Services/Environmental/Greening+Strategy/default+greening+strategy.htm)

During Canadian Environment Week, June 4-8, 2007, promote energy conservation and sustainable transportation by providing your employees the tools to make environmentally friendly choices every day. Included in this edition of **Workplace Wellness** is a pamphlet titled "An A-Z of Environmental Actions". Raise awareness and educate your employees by posting some of these items on your bulletin boards in common staff areas.

Sustainable changes that will protect our health and the environment require the collaboration of individuals, industries and corporations. By contributing your part in building a healthier community, we all benefit.

To obtain a copy of the "20/20 The Way to Clean Air" planner guide, the "State of the Environment Report 2005", or for more information on the Environmental Health Program at York Region Health Services, contact Health Connection at: 1-800-361-5653.

### did you know?

In 2006 5 smog advisories were issued for the York-Durham forecast region due to high levels of ground level ozone or fine particulate matter affecting a total of 11 days. This compares to 14 in 2005 affecting a total of 48 days. Air quality is a complex entity that is dependent on pollutants, meteorological conditions, location of pollutant release and other factors.

To join the Ontario Smog Alert Network and for more information, visit the Ontario Ministry of Environment's website [www.airqualityontario.com](http://www.airqualityontario.com) which provides current Air Quality Index readings including those from Newmarket's Air Quality Monitoring Station.

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**York Region**

Workplace Wellness Program  
Health Connection  
1-800-361-5653

## Research in Review

### Water for Tomorrow

According to the Water for Tomorrow program, York Region businesses, industry and institutions account for close to 26% of the municipal demand for water. Businesses use water in three ways:

- for air conditioning systems
- for toilets, showers, dishwashing and laundry
- for industrial processes

Taking steps to conserve water in your workplace is not only an environmentally friendly practice, but is also a wise business strategy as it can help you reduce operating costs.

Over 14,000 businesses, almost 78,000 households, and 195 schools participated in water conservation activities through the Water for Tomorrow program between 1998 and 2004. The program provided:

- water-saving devices such as early-closing toilet flappers and low flow showerheads
- water use audits
- education about the benefits of water conservation

York Region has one of the largest and most comprehensive water efficiency programs in North America. In 2006, these efforts resulted in a savings of 20.3 million litres of water a day. This translates into over 14,375 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions reduced annually as a result of the program.

**Workplace Implications:** Are you interested in learning more about water efficiency in the workplace? Call 1-888-967-5426 or visit: [www.water4tomorrow.com](http://www.water4tomorrow.com) for helpful tips, online publications and information about the free water efficient landscape audit program.

## NATIONAL SAFE KIDS WEEK MAY 28 to JUNE 3, 2007

Did you know that drowning is the second-highest cause of injury-related death for children ages 1-4? York Region Health Services will be participating in this campaign to raise awareness and educate parents and caregivers regarding keeping their children safe especially near backyard pools. For more information, or to obtain brochures for your workplace, contact Health Connection.

For general campaign information visit [www.safekidscanada.ca](http://www.safekidscanada.ca)

## How to Grow a Healthy Lawn Without Pesticides

*A healthy lawn will out-compete weeds, be less susceptible to insect problems and shouldn't need pesticides.*

### To achieve a healthy lawn:

- Test your soil using a do-it yourself test kit to determine pH, Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P) and Potassium (K) levels. Appropriate levels are vital for proper plant growth.
- In the spring and fall before fertilizing, topdressing and over-seeding, remove any thatch and core aerate your lawn with a mechanical aerator to reduce soil compaction and encourage deeper rooting.
- Fertilize your lawn in the spring and fall with a slow release natural fertilizer (compost or corn gluten meal).
- Top-dress your lawn with compost and a mixture of hardy, drought tolerant and pest resistant grass seed mix. Consider using mixtures of perennial ryegrass, fescues, clover and native grasses and wildflowers.
- Mow your lawn high (8 cm) to produce thicker blades of grass. Be sure to leave the clippings as an added source of nutrients and moisture.



- Water your lawn infrequently. Apply only 2.5 cm of water early in the morning once a week.
- Monitor your lawn for signs of potential pest problems. Understanding the lifecycles of various pests is necessary to help you decide if and when remedial action is needed.

For more information, visit:

Health Canada's Healthy Lawn Tips  
[www.healthylawns.net](http://www.healthylawns.net)

York Region's pesticide reduction initiatives  
[www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca)

York Region's water efficient landscaping program  
[www.water4tomorrow.com](http://www.water4tomorrow.com)

## Is 'Organic' the Way to Go?

Organic farming may benefit the environment because it avoids the use of synthetic chemicals, such as fertilizers and pesticides, and genetically modified organisms, but are these foods more nutritious and safer to eat than conventional (regular) produce?

Both organic and conventional produce are excellent sources of essential nutrients – regardless of how they are grown. Although more research is needed, there is some evidence that organic crops may be higher in vitamin C, iron, and magnesium.

With regards to safety, all produce you buy at the grocery store are regulated and monitored very closely by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

### To make sure your vegetables and fruit are clean:

- Rinse all fruits and vegetables thoroughly with cool running water. It is not recommended to use soap or detergent
- A clean produce brush can be used to scrub firm produce such as watermelons, oranges, cantaloupes and vegetables and fruit that will be eaten with the peel or skin

- Discard the outer leaves of leafy vegetables such as lettuce and cabbage

Organic or conventional? It's all about personal choice and this may depend on factors such as price, taste, appearance and availability. Whether organic or not, what's most important is that you eat plenty of vegetables and fruit each day!



## Smoking Bans - What About the Outdoors?

As of May 31, 2006 all enclosed workplaces in Ontario became 100% smoke-free under the Smoke-Free Ontario Act.

In order to build on the momentum of this important legislation and further protect employee health, York Region Health Services urges workplaces to work towards 100% Smoke-Free Outdoor Spaces.

### Options for banning or restricting outdoor smoking:

- Designate outdoor spaces 100% smoke-free

- Allow outdoor smoking only in designated areas that are at least 9 metres away from entrances, windows and intake vents

Research shows that in addition to protecting non-smokers' health, restrictive workplace smoking bans encourage smokers to cut down on their smoking, quit and stay off cigarettes permanently. In fact the tighter the workplace restrictions on smoking, the less daily smokers tend to smoke. Helping an employee become a non-smoker is also good for the bottom line in terms of cost savings in health and life insurance, reductions in absenteeism and increases in productivity.

Many organizations are developing scent awareness guidelines and scent-free policies. The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety recommends you consider the following if you're planning to implement a policy in your workplace:

- Create an employee survey to determine the extent of the problem
- Encourage participation from the health and safety committee and senior management from the outset
- Develop timelines for drafting, reviewing and implementing the policy

how sustainable our current practices and lifestyles are.

To see how you're doing, go to:  
[www.earthday.net/footprint/index.asp#](http://www.earthday.net/footprint/index.asp#)

Source: York Region Health Services Department. (2005). *Focus on Our Environment: York Region's State of the Environment Report 2005*. Newmarket, Ontario: The Regional Municipality of York.

For more information on how to create a Smoke-Free Outdoor Space workplace policy and how to provide support for employees who wish to quit smoking please call York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653.

### Additional Resources:

- [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/pubs/tobac-tabac/cessation-renoncement/index\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/pubs/tobac-tabac/cessation-renoncement/index_e.html)
- **Smokers' Helpline: 1-877-513-5333**

Source: The Ontario Tobacco Research Unit, Research Update April 2006. *Smoke-Free Workplaces: Not Just for Nonsmokers*.

- Inform and educate employees about the policy
- Reinforce that the policy applies to everyone – both staff and visitors
- Select wording for 'scent/fragrance-free' signs and post them throughout your workplace

Source: [www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/scent\\_free.html](http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/scent_free.html)

## Scents and Sensitivities

The use of scented products indoors can have an impact on health. Some people suffer a wide range of health effects such as: headaches, dizziness, rashes, confusion, fatigue and shortness of breath. The severity of symptoms can vary, and even small amounts of odours and scents can trigger an allergic or asthmatic response in some individuals.

## Can One Person Really Make a Difference to Our Environment? YES!

Every person, family and business in York Region can make choices to strengthen our connection to our environment. Choosing to manage our resources wisely is important.

Start by determining your own ecological footprint. An ecological footprint tells us how our lifestyle affects the natural environment. It measures how much land and water we occupy or use in order to produce the resources we consume, and absorb all the waste we produce.

By measuring the impact we have on our natural environment and comparing it to nature's own productivity, we can determine



## BE AN ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPION

Looking for more information on how you can be an environmental champion in your workplace and community? These websites contain tips, tools, quizzes and much more!

[www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca)

[www.airqualityontario.com](http://www.airqualityontario.com)

[www.toronto.ca/health/2020](http://www.toronto.ca/health/2020)

[www.gtcleanaironline.ca](http://www.gtcleanaironline.ca)

[www.ec.gc.ca](http://www.ec.gc.ca)

[www.earthday.ca](http://www.earthday.ca)

[www.envirolink.org](http://www.envirolink.org)

[www.smartcommute.ca](http://www.smartcommute.ca)

[www.cleanairchampions.ca](http://www.cleanairchampions.ca)

[www.commuterchallenge.ca](http://www.commuterchallenge.ca)

[www.toolsofchange.com/English/firstsplit.asp](http://www.toolsofchange.com/English/firstsplit.asp)

[www.cleanairpartnership.org](http://www.cleanairpartnership.org)

[www.davidsuzuki.org/WOL/Challenge/](http://www.davidsuzuki.org/WOL/Challenge/)

[www.ene.gov.on.ca/envision/air/smog/health.htm](http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/envision/air/smog/health.htm)

[www.safeclimate.net](http://www.safeclimate.net)

[www.rco.on.ca](http://www.rco.on.ca)

[www.cleanairday.com](http://www.cleanairday.com)

## what's on!

### Upcoming Health Days

#### May

- May 1-7 National Summer Safety Week  
[www.safety-council.org](http://www.safety-council.org)
- May 6-12 Emergency Preparedness Week  
[www.emergencypreparednessweek.ca](http://www.emergencypreparednessweek.ca)
- May 6-12 North American Occupational Safety and Health Week  
[www.naosh.org](http://www.naosh.org)
- May 7-13 National Mental Health Week  
[www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)
- May 12 Canada Health Day  
[www.cpha.ca](http://www.cpha.ca)

#### June

- May 28-June 3 Sun Awareness Week  
[www.dermatology.ca](http://www.dermatology.ca)
- June 1-22 Relay for Life  
[www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)
- June 4-8 Canadian Environment Week  
[www.ec.gc.ca](http://www.ec.gc.ca)
- June 5 World Environment Day  
[www.unep.org](http://www.unep.org)
- June 6 Clean Air Day  
[www.ec.gc.ca](http://www.ec.gc.ca)

### Nutrition Information

#### New Canada's Food Guide Available

Health Canada releases new Canada's Food Guide. To order copies of *Eating Well With Canada's Food Guide*, visit [www.canadasfoodguide.net](http://www.canadasfoodguide.net). For orders over 100, call 1-800-622-6232.

### Economic Development

If you, or your management team, are interested in economic development in the region, you may be interested in the articles and notices of business events and trade missions available at [www.yorkeconomicinsights.ca](http://www.yorkeconomicinsights.ca).

### Register Early!

The seventh annual Workplace Wellness conference, titled "Bullying in the Workplace: What Every Business Needs to Know", is being held on October 24, 2007 at Cardinal Golf Club. The keynote speaker will be Glenn French, President and CEO of the Canadian Initiative on Workplace Violence. Workplace violence has germinated in Canada in a variety of forms and is quietly growing. Come join us for the morning and learn how to identify and effectively manage "workplace bullying".

Registration is \$65. For more information, call Health Connection at: 1-800-361-5653.

Please call Health Connection for more information

# 1-800-361-5653

## Workplace Wellness in Action at Combined Insurance Company of America



wellness plan. Healthy eating was also on the menu last year, with the **Healthy Measures in the Workplace** program provided by York Region Health Services nutritionists. Liddy Goveas, an executive assistant, acknowledged that "Combined Insurance has made great strides to help the well-being of its employees. In today's stress filled world we need all the assistance we can get and with the Healthy Measures program I can read food labels more accurately and plan more nutritious meals".

Simone Khan, an employee in the claims department, credits the company's wellness initiatives for supporting her personal wellness goals and keeping her motivated. She has recently made major lifestyle changes that have resulted in a phenomenal amount of weight loss.

How motivated are the employees to keep the wellness program alive? One of the departments developed a morning break exercise program to get employees moving. It is involvement from all levels of staff that keeps the wellness program at the top of the priority list for the company. The fact that management supports the program, provides a budget for health and wellness activities and also encourages employee involvement speaks volumes.

Jamie plans to continue attending the networking meetings hosted by the York Region Health Services Workplace Wellness Program. The networking meetings held 2 times a year provide an opportunity for businesses in York Region to connect and learn from each others' experiences about developing and sustaining a wellness program. Jamie hopes that by learning from each other and bringing back information for their wellness committee as further food for thought, their program can continue to reach both their short term and long term goals.

"Workplace Wellness in Action" is a regular feature of the Workplace Wellness Newsletter. To find out how your workplace wellness program can be featured in a future issue of the newsletter, please call Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653.

An **invaluable service** is how Jamie Soo, HR Recruiter and Training Coordinator at Combined Insurance in Markham, describes the support his organization has received from the York Region Health Services Workplace Wellness Program. Beyond the workshops, displays and resources; the Comprehensive Workplace Wellness Model and the networking meetings have kept Combined Insurance on the right track.

The Markham location of Combined Insurance Company of America is home to 225 employees. The company provides supplemental insurance coverage including: accident, health, life, disability and critical insurance.

For 2 years now, Combined Insurance has hosted a health expo intended to raise awareness about wellness. In 2005, employees learned about healthier food choices and Combined Insurance supported this learning by hosting a harvest fruit and vegetable market sale on site.

With growing interest in health and wellness at Combined Insurance, Jamie knew the program had to move beyond the annual health expo to include year long programs and initiatives to benefit the employees, and in the long run, the company's overall wellness. He describes promoting comprehensive workplace health as a win-win scenario for both the employees and the company.

Last year, the focus was on Healthy Active Living and the health expo provided an ideal opportunity to kick-off their official workplace wellness program. The most successful initiative in 2006 was the pedometer challenge held in the fall. Twenty eight people participated and many have continued to include walking as part of their regular individual

We welcome your suggestions, ideas and comments. If you have a topic you would like to read about in a future issue, or if you would like to receive an electronic copy of this newsletter please contact us at [workplace.wellness@york.ca](mailto:workplace.wellness@york.ca).

