

7.0 SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

The workplace environment should support active choices and make it as easy as possible for employees to make healthy decisions. There is a close connection between this environmental component – that deals with the physical and infrastructure aspects of a healthy workplace – and the healthy policies area (health policies information can be found in Section 8.0).

A supportive environment would ensure that there are no physical impediments that would prevent or discourage physical activity, provide “activity enablers” that make it easy to be active and where possible the environment should assist employees with special needs who may wish to be active.

BC’s Ministry of Health suggests that a health promoting environment supports employees’ attempts in healthy decision making by making the healthy choices the easy choices. And, by creating an environment that is conducive to activity, the organization is visibly demonstrating its commitment to the Active Workplace Plan.

The Active Workplace Checklist and Planning Guide (in Section 4.3) will help you take stock of the specific environmental issues requiring attention. Using this tool will help to focus on areas where infrastructure is lacking or conditions are less than ideal for promoting active healthy living.



7.1 Examples of Supportive Environmental Considerations

Your workplace physical environment should support healthy choices and be conducive to employees becoming active. Several considerations are:

Clean Stairwells: a pleasant stairwell environment can help to encourage employees to take the stairs. Stairwells should be clean, well-lit, properly ventilated and secure. Some organizations have had success in posting signs, catchy phrases and slogans, message boards and even artwork in stairwells to make them more interesting.

Bike Racks/Storage : employees who choose to ride their bikes to work find that the provision of bike racks/storage are examples of the organization’s support for the Active Workplace Initiative.

Smoke-free Environment: it is a good idea to ensure that there is a sufficient separation between areas in which smoking is permitted and areas through which employees must pass, such as the entrances to buildings, courtyards, etc. If your workplace has employees who deliver health and social services to people in their own homes, Policy Development Guidelines to Protect Workers from Smoke in Home Environments is a paper you will find useful. The paper contains guidelines and

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resource web links about how to provide workers who deliver health and social services to people in their homes the same level of protection from secondhand smoke that others enjoy in smoke-free office workplaces. The document can be downloaded from www.ptcc-cfc.on.ca/pubs/RDS_0076.pdf

General Workspace Environment: programs included in the plan may involve employees being active in general or common areas (lobbies, cafeterias, lunch rooms, etc.) or possibly even at their desks. It is therefore important that environmental controls including heating and ventilation are properly set.

Spaces, Options and Facilities Specifically to Enhance Active Choices: some organizations elect to provide facilities and access to nutritious food options to proactively facilitate the uptake of physical activity and healthy living behaviour. This can range from simply offering change and/or shower rooms that make active commuting more convenient to the provision of a complete fitness or wellness centre. The City of Kamloops offers two well-furnished employee gym facilities which are maintained and managed by their Wellness Works Committee. Creating options to enhance active choices can also include ensuring the workforce is able to acquire healthy foods in cafeterias or vending machines. The decision to provide these types of facilities and food options is usually tied to a valid business case and should be in response to needs identified during the situational analysis phase of the planning process. Resources to help organizations decide the relevance of these options are available on the Public Health Agency of Canada's Business Case for Active Living at [Work Website](#):

(www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/fitness/work/case_template_e.html).

An Example of Corporate Commitment to a Supportive Environment: QLT Inc., a Vancouver-based biopharmaceutical company, encourages fitness beyond the use of the fitness centre facilities, through initiatives such as the following:

- Employees are encouraged to bicycle to work, and have a secure room – not just a bicycle rack – where they can leave their bicycles during the day. They also have access to the fitness centre showers following their ride to work, and are the only group of employees allowed to have overnight lockers.
- The company sponsors a wide variety of sports teams including soccer, volleyball, running, and a highly popular dragon boat team. These teams complement the runs and related events which the company sponsors. Typically, an employee or group of employees takes the lead in organizing a team or group, and seeks financial support from the company. The company supports these teams at \$500 per team. These funds come from the Social Committee budget.
- QLT operates a cafeteria in which it offers healthy choices. Employee volunteers also conduct Weight Watchers classes. The two come together when the cafeteria regularly provides a Weight Watchers menu.
- A supervised facility (called the Family Room) to which employees can bring their children as a last resort if their own child care arrangements have failed on a particular day. Not a permanent care facility, the Family Room is to be used in situations of child care emergencies only. Without it, the parent would likely have to stay at home with the child and miss a day of work.

8.0 SUPPORTIVE POLICIES

The Active Workplace Plan should include opportunities for the Active Workplace Committee to work with corporate decision makers to ensure that the organization's policies support the employee population being active. Experts suggest that corporate policies actually define the organization's will, desire and determination to provide its employees with opportunities to make active healthy choices. Supportive organizations ensure that the working culture, operating practices and internal systems or procedures are based on policies that allow and facilitate staff to be active.

It is important to remember that Active Workplace Initiatives are most successful when company policies and practices clearly demonstrate that the organization understands the value of the concept and fully supports its workforce becoming healthier by choosing to be more physically active.

The Alberta Centre for Active Living Workplace Physical Activity Framework suggests that policies that support Active Workplace Initiatives might include: allowing time for physical activity during the workday; formally recognizing participation programs; providing commuting policies; specifying qualifications for program personnel; and involving all employees including non-permanent and shift workers. The framework poses the following questions:

- Does the organization's policies or procedures promote and/or support physical activity for employees such as no scheduled meetings over the lunch hour or allowing flex-time?
- Does the organization formally recognize employees who participate in physical activity?

- Do your organization's policies encourage active commuting to and from work such as allowing employees time to change before work if they commit to making up time later in the day?
- Is it company policy to hire qualified and experienced people to manage and implement the Active Workplace Initiative?

As was the case in supportive environments, the Active Workplace Checklist and Planning Guide (see Section 4.3) is a useful tool to help identify areas where your organization could benefit from new or revised policies that promote active healthy living.

8.1 Examples of Supportive Policy Considerations

Your plan must be supported by policies that encourage employees to become more active and by internal procedures that make the healthy choice the easy choice. Several examples that you might consider are:

Active transportation policy: hand-in-hand with the provision of physical amenities (such as bike racks and change facilities), in the event of inclement weather, this policy would provide for emergency taxi fares for employees who use modes of active transportation to and from work.

Activity entitlement policy: strategies should not rely solely on active approaches requiring individual initiatives such as enrolling in exercise class. Policies should also encourage unstructured activities such as walking or that permit employees to exercise during working hours.

Financial allowance policy: the workplace can have a policy to reimburse the employee for certain costs associated with being physically active such as the purchase of equipment or joining a health club. The District of Campbell River provides access to the recreation department's fitness programs, weight room and courts at 50% off the regular rate.

Flex time policy: some workplaces allow staff to build a certain amount of flexibility in the scheduling of their work day so that they can conveniently become active before, during or after work. Ideas for compressed work weeks, flex time, tele-work and employee assistance programs can be downloaded from www.lambtonhealth.on.ca/workplace/ActionGuide.asp. See pages 203-210 of the Healthy Living @ Work Workplace Action Guide for sample policies and collective bargaining agreements.

Food policy: this policy would target the eating habits of the workforce and would be intended to increase the selection and availability of nutrient foods available through workplace food services. The organization would work with contractors that supply products to vending machines and ensure that the cafeteria menu is appropriately engineered. The Food & Health Policy Template is a useful tool to help you write your healthy eating policy. The document contains a series of questions for each of the policy sections to guide you through preparing the policy. (www.healthatwork.org.uk/pdf.pl?file=haw/files/healthy%20eating%20policy.pdf)

Examples of Policies and Practices that Demonstrate Commitment to the Plan: In addition to providing employees with Lunch and Learns on health and fitness, Chevron participates in the YWCA of Vancouver Workplace Wellness Membership, providing employees with reduced rates on membership at the Health and Wellness Centre. Chevron also has medical service providers (physiotherapist and physician) available for employee referral.

Another creative example used by a small rural company was to purchase ten company memberships from a local health club. Employees sign out the memberships for 2-hour time periods, do their workout and return the membership card to the worksite. When the employee first signs out the membership, they pay \$10 to the gym for a personal fitness assessment and training plan developments. The workplace has supported this initiative by implementing a flex-time policy to make it easier for a personal fitness assessment and development of a training plan.