**Council Direction:**

Not applicable

**Information:**

The workplace is considered a ‘determinant of health’ since both the physical environment and the culture of the organization have an impact on employee health and well-being. With the increasing costs associated with poor employee health, coupled with the expense and disruption of employee turnover, it is wise business sense to put programs in place to create and maintain a healthy organization\(^1\). From an organizational perspective, creating a healthy organization is beneficial as it fosters a work environment that is conducive to high levels of productivity\(^2\).

Council approved a strategic direction to become a City of Choice for high performing public servants. “Integrating workplace health and human resource practices into the business strategy of the organization is often regarded as the key ingredient of success”\(^3\). The City of Hamilton Human Resources Strategy (2004), which supports Council’s vision of becoming a City of Choice, includes workplace health programming as part of a Respectful and Supportive Workplace. In particular, the strategy states that in a respectful and supportive workplace, employees are supported in finding an effective and healthy work/life balance.

The following tactics are identified within the Human Resources Strategy to help employees find an effective and healthy work/life balance:

| To: | Chair and Members  
Corporate Administration Committee |
|-----|---------------------------|
| From: | Catherine Graham  
General Manager  
Human Resources |
| Telephone: | (905) 546-2424 x2631 |
| Facsimile: | (905) 546-2650 |
| E-mail: | cgraham@hamilton.ca |
| Date: | September 27, 2006 |
| Re: | Workplace Health Program: Work Better @ Hamilton  
(HUR06016) (City Wide) |
A comprehensive “wellness” approach, with emphasis on physical, social and psychological well-being, is in place that promotes the total health of every employee, in and outside of work.

Supportive policies and flexible work arrangements are in place and are used to assist employees in effective work/life balance.

Resource Allocation:

The Healthy Workplace Specialist in Human Resources is assigned to the workplace health program. The budget for this program is funded through the Benefits Reserve.

Healthy Workplace Model:

The model for workplace health, supported by both Health Canada and the National Quality Institute (NQI), is based on three inter-related factors that influence the health of an organization and its employees:

1. **Physical Environment** – The physical environment is often addressed through occupational health & safety efforts, with the goal of reducing work-related injury, illness and disability.

2. **Individual Health Practices** – The workplace is an important setting in which almost any lifestyle behaviour can be addressed should the needs of the employees indicate interest.

3. **Organizational Culture** – Organizational culture initiatives generally focus on changing or improving the organizational working environment. Elements of the organizational environment include leadership style, management practices, the way in which work is organized, employee autonomy and control, and social support.

Of these three elements, it is the culture of the organization that has the most impact on the health of the organization and the employees working there. “A healthy work organization is defined as one whose culture, climate and practices create an environment that promotes both employee health and safety as well as organizational effectiveness.” Research demonstrates that “a set of workplace health programs is likely to have only limited impact unless the organization has a supportive and enabling culture, and the initiatives are nurtured by organizational leaders as part of their strategic plan.”

Benefits of Workplace Health Programs:

The following are same examples of successful investment returns from Canadian workplace health promotion programs:

- When Canada Life Assurance Co. reviewed the results of its wellness program, it found that over the course of a decade, each dollar the corporation had spent on health promotion reaped a reward of close to $7.
- At B.C. Hydro, an internal cost benefit analysis after a ten-year program showed the program returned a saving of $3 for every dollar spent.
After implementing a workplace health program, the Winnipeg-based Canadian Wheat Board found an annual rate of 3.8 sick days per employee, as compared with the 6.2 day average reported by Statistics Canada.

Comprehensive Workplace Health Promotion:

Comprehensive workplace health promotion is defined as "an approach to protecting and enhancing the health of employees that relies and builds upon the efforts of employers to create a supportive management under and upon the efforts of employees to care for their own well-being"8.

A comprehensive approach requires a combination of the following types of health promotion strategies to be effective:

**Awareness raising, education and skill-building** – Activities that give employees information needed to help make healthy lifestyle choices such as providing resources and information on a variety of health-related topics.

**Environmental support** – A work environment that encourages and supports healthy lifestyles by, for example, providing opportunities for employees to be active at work.

**Policy development** – Workplace guidelines that support healthy lifestyle choices such as policies that promote health and well-being.

Program Goals:

**Short-term**
To establish a comprehensive approach to the development and implementation of a workplace health program for City of Hamilton employees, ensuring that the program:
- is based on best practices in workplace health, including the model supported by both Health Canada and NQI;
- follows health promotion strategies including awareness raising, education and skill building; environmental support; and policy development;
- reflects both organizational and employee needs and interests;
- integrates health promotion with business goals and objectives; and
- has support and buy-in from organizational leaders and employees.

**Long-term**
To improve the health of the organization and its employees through a comprehensive approach to workplace health so as to:
- decrease the proportion of employees who smoke;
- increase the proportion of employees with healthy eating habits;
- increase the proportion of employees participating in regular physical activity;
- increase the proportion of adults who are free of injury as well as chronic and communicable diseases;
- increase the proportion of employees who experience work-life balance;
- improve employee satisfaction.
• decrease organizational costs, including WSIB, STD, LTD, and benefits costs;
• decrease absenteeism rates;
• decrease work-related injury and/or illness; and
• improve recruitment and retention of high performing employees.

Program Implementation:
To date, the following initiatives have been offered as part of the workplace health program:
• development of workbetter@hamilton section on Enet in November 2005;
• workplace health information presented at Corporate New Employee Orientation since December 2005;
• Employee and Family Assistance Program new provider as of January 1, 2006;
• Smoking Cessation Aid Reimbursement Program from March through June, 2006;
• SummerActive Physical Activity Challenge in May and June 2006; and
• proper hand washing and cough/sneeze etiquette awareness as part of pandemic planning in August 2006.

The program is still in its initial stages and there are many more exciting initiatives on the horizon. The following summary outlines program initiatives planned for 2007 and beyond:
• workplace health program development for Waste Management, Waste Collection Operators;
• development of an office ergonomics program;
• training in mental health awareness for managers and supervisors; and
• development of a physical activity strategy, providing a variety of options for employees to be active both at home and at work.

A yearly update on the workplace health program will be provided in the Human Resources annual report.

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Catherine Graham
General Manager
Human Resources

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3 Gunderson, M., (2002). Rethinking Productivity from a Workplace Perspective. CPRN.
4 The Health Communication Unit at the Centre for Health Promotion, University of Toronto. (July 2004). An Introduction to Comprehensive Workplace Health Promotion.