

A View from the Top

Paramount Canada's Wonderland is enjoying the ride to health and safety success.

By Bev Cline

The health and safety of its guests and staff are the number one priority at Paramount Canada's Wonderland. From the most senior executives through to its mostly seasonal workforce, health and safety — as a concept and an everyday reality — are integral components of all aspects of the Vaughan, Ontario park's operations.

"The importance of health and safety really begins with our mission statement," explains Phil Liggett, Vice-President, Park Operations, Paramount Canada's Wonderland. "Our mission is to make people happy by providing fun, excitement and memorable experiences. Supporting the statement are four core beliefs that work hand-in-hand: safety, which is first and foremost, along with quality, guest satisfaction and teamwork. Each of these is a central philosophy to the way we run our business here at Wonderland each and every day."

More than 2.5 million guests flock to Paramount Canada's Wonderland each year. And with close to 4,000 staff, of whom 3,800 are seasonal, it's clear the issue of safety needs to be instilled throughout the organization. Also, there has to be accountability.

"We are continuously measuring ourselves against our mission statement," states Liggett frankly. "Since the Park opened in the 1980-1981 season, we've established a reputation for excellence in safety. Still, we look at our record every year, and try to make sure we're keeping up-to-date with new additions to the park, making sure everything we do is as safe as it can be." Wonderland, indicates Liggett, is not resting on its laurels. "You can't have fun, as a guest or staff member, if you don't feel safe," he says.

"When management and staff get together, whether it's a company business update or weekly meeting, safety is top of the list as to what we discuss," continues Liggett. "We make certain that senior management's commitment to safety flows through the organization continuously. For example, I don't think I've picked up a company newsletter yet that didn't have a section about safety ideas and reminders for our staff."

Training emphasizes safety issues

"For many of the Park's employees, particularly seasonal workers, Wonderland represents their first job," explains Mike Fish, Manager, Safety & Environment. "So it's integral that they understand, right from their first three-hour orientation meeting, that safety is the top priority at Wonderland."

During the orientation generic safety issues such as the role of WHMIS are discussed. "At this first training session, which is spearheaded by our human resources department, we emphasize our mission statement and core beliefs," says Fish. "As a result, the staff naturally sees the importance of safety in our operation."

Later, as staff are assigned to their specific locations, safety training becomes more site specific. Depending on the job tasks an employee will be asked to perform, training can include vehicle training, fire safety, safe handling of materials, or the use of protective equipment. Often, this training is provided in March or April, before the park opens for the season.

The benefit of a clearly defined and executed safety training system is that it instills knowledge and pride throughout the organization. "Our feeling is that it's all about participation, buy-in and everyone throughout the organization being pointed in the same direction and sharing a common goal. Then obviously we will have better results," remarks Liggett.

"If staff feel safe in their environment and understand that their safety is a priority, then one of the key benefits is that they will be even more committed to the safety of our guests. Our staff feel pride in our reputation for safety and strive hard to maintain that level of excellence for themselves and for our guests."

Safety as a day-to-day initiative

To ensure that health and safety is a day-to-day initiative, Paramount Canada's Wonderland has developed a number of different — yet interconnected-safety programs and procedures that include staff training, reporting and accountability. Together, these feed into the common goal of providing a safe work experience.



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Safety procedures and training within departments: As an amusement park, Wonderland appears to an outsider as one large business. But in everyday reality, the park actually functions as a group of small departments/teams working together. For example, the park has its own security and utility departments, food, landscaping, water park, entertainment/live shows, and maintenance departments — each with its own manager and staff and uniqueness.

Each of these departments develops and maintains its own safety programs and procedures that reflect the diversity of its work tasks and needs. While each staff member's perspective on safety is the same, there is specific training, pertaining to the job, for front line staff, supervisory personnel and area managers. As well, each department has accountability for safety built into its reporting structure.

Further, these departments draw on the strength and knowledge of two company-wide resources: a very large and experienced safety department and an active Joint Health and Safety Committee.

Company-wide safety department: Canada's Wonderland safety department acts as a resource for departments/teams, including consultation and assistance with implementation on specific issues and initiatives.

Joint Health and Safety Committee: This is a very functional and accessible committee comprised of worker and management representatives from each of the departments/teams in the park, as well as a number of members of senior management. Members of the Committee are very active in the workplace, spreading the safety message and conducting monthly workplace inspections. These inspections are over and above the inspections done as part of the regular business. In addition, Committee members talk with their counterparts and bring safety issues back to the Committee at large, ensuring there is continuity throughout the organization.

Liggett points out that safety for Paramount Canada's Wonderland also includes looking forward to the future. On the guest side, as an illustration, there is event planning safety and emergency preparedness to consider.

Still, it is the overall commitment to safety that distinguishes Wonderland and instills pride in workers and staff, expounds Liggett. "Much of our safety training is site-specific. Whether its instruction for running a roller coaster or for safety systems needed for the landscaping department, we are proud of all our training. But the common denominator is the level of commitment to safety throughout the organization to ensure a safe and pleasurable time at the park for our guests and our workers."

Phil Liggett, Vice-President, Park Operations (top)
Mike Fish, Manager, Safety & Environment (bottom)