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ALBERTA HEALTH SERVICES**

**REMARKS TO THE ALBERTA HEALTH SERVICES'
FACILITIES, MAINTENANCE AND ENGINEERING STAFF**

**BY TELEHEALTH
FROM MEDICINE HAT REGIONAL HOSPITAL**

MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2010

12:00 noon

I am speaking to you today from Medicine Hat where I have just inspected the maintenance facilities of the hospital. It was here that on November 18th last year Sheldon Miller, one of your colleagues, died while at work. He died performing routine maintenance, converting a tractor from summer operations to winter use.

Sheldon had been employed with us for four years, was 29 years old and had two kids. You can imagine how it felt for Sheldon's family to say farewell him in the morning and for him not to return home that night. I have written to the family to express our sincere sympathies as I met with them a few minutes ago. Sheldon died, in part, because we at Alberta Health Services hadn't provided him with the proper training in how to perform the maintenance. We had a workplace which was non-compliant in the sense that there were hoists and other facilities which weren't as safe as they ought to have been. They are now, but that is not good enough.

Sheldon's death should be a wake-up call to all of us. We all have responsibilities in Occupational Health and Safety, me as the organization's leader, right through to every other employee. We need to set a clear

expectation that we do not want another fatality in Alberta Health Services . . . ever.

Across our whole organization people go to work because they want to help others, but the health industry is one where a lot of harm can come to our own employees. We have back problems, we have needle stick injuries, we have stress, and in Sheldon's case we had a death. We should regard this as intolerable.

I would like to set a zero tolerance approach to occupational injury. We should be setting a new standard, where we say that my job as a leader in this organization, and the job of all other managers, is to ensure that our workplaces are safe. . . that we are providing you with the work environment that is safe for you.

The Executive got a full briefing on what happened here in Medicine Hat late last year. We will meet with Sheldon's family to disclose the result of that investigation in the near future. But what I want to come out of Sheldon's death, is to transform this organization.

We need to set a new expectation that we shouldn't put you at risk and you shouldn't accept being put at risk to do your job. If something is not safe, don't do it. If you are not sure, ask your manager. If they are not sure, get them to call the Workplace Health and Safety Advisor. Do whatever you need to do to make the work safe before you put yourself or anyone else at risk. You will be fully supported in this.

It is okay to take longer to get things done if that is what you need to do, to do it safely. But I am asking you to do more than just look after your own safety. I want you to look after other peoples' safety as well. Don't walk by an unsafe condition without drawing it to someone's attention. If there is water or ice on the floor, that someone might slip on, make sure people know about it. Don't walk by a co-worker who is doing something unsafe. Intervene, tell them to stop, talk to your supervisor. We need to do that from now on.

There is a lot more that needs to be done. The Workplace Health and Safety people have just completed a [new Workplace Health and Safety Strategy](#) for the whole organization and it been endorsed by the executive. I am releasing that today.

You in maintenance will know that we have gone around to every site to see if the same risks that Sheldon faced were faced in your workplace. I hope that has all been fixed up now. If it has not, I want you to tell me. We will be including workplace injury rates in our management monitoring. As I said, I want these to hit zero.

I know how easy it is to get injured at work. Some time ago I worked on a psychiatric ward in a hospital in Australia. One of the patients acting out smashed a window. I removed the glass from the window in an unsafe way. A piece of glass fell and smashed into my thumb. I still have a scar where that happened. If the glass had been bigger or fallen at a different angle, I am not sure I would have a thumb today. So I know how these things can happen. It was a minor accident, and I was fortunate, but I understand how much more serious accidents can happen. You are doing your best to get the job done, you think that you have got things under control and the risk is acceptable but in fact, it's not.

So I would ask you to help us, to help your colleagues, to help yourself, in improving workplace health and safety in this organization. In that way we can be sure that Sheldon Miller will be the last death that occurs amongst your colleagues.

Thanks for listening.