

# Been there, done that ...



*Lead hand Allan Yamchuk with safety champion Wendy Irwin, who played a big role in his recovery from an unexpected workplace accident.*

Been there,  
done that ...

# ... got the T-shirt

After 15 years, Wendy Irwin knows a thing or two about getting people back to work

By: Jamie Hall

**W**endy Irwin wears many hats at Iko Industries—human resources, health and safety, payroll and benefits, to name a few. Allan Yamchuk thinks she needs to wear a cape, too—like Wonder Woman.

OK, maybe she's not Wonder Woman, but she's definitely a champion when it comes to helping employees injured on the job return to work quickly and safely.

"If it wasn't for Wendy, I don't think things would've turned out as well for me," says Allan, 51. "She went above and beyond and made sure things were done the way they should've been."

When it comes to managing WCB claims, Wendy is tenacious and dogged—a self-described "pit bull."

#### **Fine-tuning her process**

Her "process," as she calls it, is a disability management program she has developed and fine-tuned over her 15-year career, most spent in the fast-paced world of oil and gas. Modified work is a cornerstone of the program, but so are communication and respect.

She has reversed the misfortunes of many a company, including one former employer who saw its claim costs

reduced by a whopping 95 per cent during her tenure.

She has enjoyed a lot of success in the three years since she joined Iko Industries, a company that's considered a global leader in the manufacture and supply of residential shingles, commercial roofing and waterproofing products, and insulation systems. Their lost-time claims have decreased dramatically since her arrival. And, for the first time, the plant recently recorded 1,026 days—and counting—of no lost time. Near-miss reporting, which was once practically non-existent, has increased dramatically, with 135 reports so far this year.

"That tells you your people are communicating," Wendy says. "It's a culture thing. I've worked with employees to create a no-blame environment: just tell someone so we can fix it. It's about creating a safer workplace." >>

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### Unexpected accident

Allan has been with Iko for more than 25 years. As a lead hand, he monitors the myriad of automated systems at the company's massive shingle plant in Calgary from a central control room, but also rolls up his sleeves to help co-workers whenever the need arises.

It was during one such instance—helping to unplug a shingle elevator—that Allan was accidentally knocked to the ground. Though sore, he decided to “walk it off” and went on to finish his shift. He filed a first aid report before he went home; but by the next morning he found himself barely able to move and in considerable pain.

### Performed meaningful modified duties

“I called Wendy to let her know and she said, ‘We can work through this. Come back to work and I’ll put you on light duties,’” says Allan. “I had no problem at all doing that.”

He spent the following week in the office, using his knowledge to update binders with information about the

availability of the chemicals in use at the plant. A week later, his WCB case manager, Martina James, arranged an appointment for an MRI, which revealed the extent of his injuries: a fracture in his left tibia and fibula and a torn meniscus.

“I let Wendy know and she took charge,” he says. “She and Martina put everything in motion—the light duties, my physio appointments. Everything fell into place.”

### Worked within his physical restrictions while recovering

Allan performed duties within his physical capability, kept going to physio and over time, returned to his full-time date-of-accident job in the plant's control room. James is quick to give credit where it's due.

“Wendy made sure Allan wasn't being pushed to do more than he could and he kept in touch with the medical people,” says Martina. “She takes modified work seriously and is willing to make the offer right away, understanding that the modified

work must be within a worker's work restrictions.”

For Wendy, Allan's claim is “textbook,” the result of everyone pulling the oars in the same direction: employee, employer, the medical community and WCB.

“The cooperation and communication that took place was truly best practice,” says Martina.

### It's all about respect

Wendy's passion stems not just from her work experience, but from her life experience, too. Most people in her family made their living as tradespeople; some got hurt along the way, including her father and her son. Her former husband was off work for six weeks when their three children were little more than toddlers.

“It's not like I'm new to this,” she says. “I've seen some nasty injuries.”

“Listen, people don't come to work to hurt themselves. They want to be part of the team, to be good employees, good colleagues. It comes down to respect and I give them that respect.” WS

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