

News

Lorain County companies offer incentives for healthy employees (with video)

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ELYRIA — Local businesses have found good results as they encourage their workers to get healthy.

Invacare Corp. has about 1,300 workers in Elyria and North Ridgeville and has offered health and wellness incentives for years, said Karen Chapple, corporate director of safety and health.

“This is kind of a normal outcome of being a medical manufacturing company, that we would be concerned about the health of our associates,” Chapple said.

Invacare has created a virtual walk program in place for 10 years.

The program incorporates teams of workers at Invacare’s facilities around the world. The most recent round, a virtual walk along the Mediterranean, ended Aug. 7 and involved 1,600 workers in 16 countries who walked the equivalent of 450,000 miles.

Employees wear pedometers and log their daily steps and report it to <http://www.healthyohio.org/invacare/index.htm>. The program has boosted employee morale within the entire company, Chapple said.

“Really, the end result is we’ve encouraged activities,” Chapple said. “We let each individual make their own personal

improvements because it's a team activity, it a team success."

The program has become another model for ways businesses can encourage good health habits, said Stephen Musgrave, president of the Wellness Council of Northeast Ohio.

Musgrave cited the federal Centers for Disease Control, which list numerous potential benefits including reducing employee turnover, cutting absenteeism, improving worker satisfaction, morale and productivity.

"The reason why I love it is a thing called return on investment," Musgrave said.

Loads of material about health and wellness is available free, especially online, Musgrave said. Even so, some companies are slow to embrace the concept because it will take some up-front investment and follow-up by talking to people, he said.

"I appreciate the difficulty," Musgrave said. "I also know that people really respect the effort."

It may seem obvious for a healthcare company to encourage good habits. Other private sector employers have created ways to help their workers integrate basic tenets of getting healthy: Eat good foods, exercise regularly, don't use tobacco products and don't abuse alcohol or drugs.

Bendix Commercial Vehicle Systems, in Elyria, is another company that fosters an employee wellness program. Bendix has about 450 workers in Elyria and about 75 percent participate in a health program to reduce employee contributions to health insurance premiums, said Gwen Scott, benefits manager for the commercial truck brake system maker.

Workers who are tobacco free, have annual blood tests and complete annual health risk assessments can cut up to \$50 a month from their employee contributions, Scott said.

The company also offers an on-site fitness center that is a "beehive" of activity, Scott said.

Bendix also will host an evening program for workers with Dr. Ann Kulze, a nationally known health and wellness consultant who will visit Lorain County for the program.

The programs and internal communication at Bendix have engaged the workers there, Scott said.

"We definitely take the perspective that it's not so much a cost as an investment," Scott said. "The small investment in prevention hopefully results in the avoidance of something catastrophic in the future."

Another wellness participant is the Beckett Corp. which has about 175 workers at its North Ridgeville headquarters. The maker of residential and commercial burners installed a fitness center about 1990 and it now has about 93 regular members. The company has a walking track and in 2006 began its Health Living Initiative.

"It just really aligns closely with our care for our employees," said Penny Seaman, director of human resources.

Beckett workers also have a financial incentive to cut their health insurance premiums by \$27 a week, Seaman said.

To get the reduction, staff participate in the "Lunch and Learn" workshops that feature speakers discussing health and nutrition topics; exercise and participate in weight loss programs; limit alcohol consumption and give up smoking.

The program operates on the honor system but workers will weigh in every six months. The company also offers a farmer's market with fresh produce delivered to workers each week.

"I would certainly see it as a very attractive part of our benefit package," Seaman said.

For more information, see: <http://www.cdc.gov/leanworks/>

URL: <http://www.morningjournal.com/articles/2011/08/21/news/mj4906923.prt>

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