

Northern Plains Railroad's workplace health plan has 27 percent of employees now in tobacco-free program

Company Name: Northern Plains Railroad, Inc. (NPR)

Location: Fordville, North Dakota

Industry: Railroad

Founded: 1997

Number of Employees: 113

Age of Workplace Health Program: 4 years

Company Profile

Northern Plains Railroad (NPR), Inc. is a short-line railroad that provides locomotive delivery of freight on leased branch-line tracks in North Dakota and Minnesota, and operates lines owned by Mohall Railroad, Inc. and Mohall Central Railroad, Inc.

Employee Health Program Origin

NPR's administrative specialist, who has been with the company since its inception in 1997, decided for personal reasons to initiate a workplace health program in 2011. She is now the company's wellness coordinator, but has a great model in NPR's owner, whom she describes as "the living pillar of health." After receiving approval from upper management, the company partnered with a health promotion, preventive health and wellness company, to develop NPR's workplace health program. NPR is building a culture of health and well-being connected to its culture of safety, with an ambition to be the healthiest railroad company in the country. The company is focused on assessing primary health risks and musculoskeletal problems as part of the on-going evolution of its workplace health program.

Northern Plains Railroad Workplace Health Program Features

Some of the main features of the NPR program are:

- « A Safety, Wellness and Awareness Team (SWAT), made up of representatives from each department who communicate with employees about the health and wellness program
- « Video testimonials on weight loss, tobacco cessation and vision recovery, available to all employees and other businesses interested in health and wellness programs
- « Wellness challenges on weight loss, healthy eating, physical activity, healthy sleep habits and walking for heart health, with cash prizes and other incentives
- « Healthy breakfast event, with portion-size guides and healthy recipes
- « Free travel stretch bands and demonstrations on how to use them



Photo provided by Northern Plains Railroad, Inc.
Employees engage in various types of wellness challenges such as physical activity

- « Walking meetings
- « Smoking-cessation campaign with rewards for those who quit, including up to \$50 reimbursement for non-prescription medications
- « Working towards having a tobacco-free campus
- « Emphasizing good health as the reward for participation
- « Reimbursement of up to \$20 a month to employees who complete a certain number of workouts a month at any local fitness club

Program Costs

Northern Plains Railroad Inc. has a health program budget of \$21,180 a year.

Program Outcomes

NPR boasts a number of employees who have quit using tobacco as a result of its health program, and 27 percent of its workforce now participates in its Tobacco Free program. The company has also seen a reduction in the number of employees who are overweight or obese.

Challenges

Communicating about the wellness program has proven a challenge because varied shifts and various crafts (laborers, engineers, administrators, etc.) in NPR's different workplace locations in Minnesota and North Dakota make it difficult to keep the culture of wellness alive. A drop-off in the number of employees participating in the health risk assessments due to transportation problems, weather, geographic locations and timing difficulties were also noted.

"I believe workplace health and wellness are important because we all want to live a healthy life," says NPR wellness coordinator, Cheryl Harlow. "After retirement we want to enjoy our time with our family. When you see coworkers and family members who can be helped with certain changes, that drives you."

Northern Plains Railroad

Facilitators of Program Success

Upper management support has greatly helped NPR's workplace health program succeed and is one of its biggest strengths, but a major factor in that success has been the dedicated administrative specialist, 10 percent of whose time is devoted to operating the wellness program. In addition, the partnership with their wellness vendor has been a significant benefit to the NPR program.

CDC supports a coordinated, systematic and comprehensive approach to workplace health promotion. This profile is intended as an example of one employer's approach and is not intended as an endorsement. For more information on developing workplace health programs, please visit <http://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion>.



**Based on an interview conducted with Northern Plains Railroad, Inc. in October 2012 as part of the development of the CDC Work@Health® employer training program. This employer is not a participant in the Work@Health® program.*