



Martin Berryman, co-owner of Wanes Custom Woodworks, gives a safety talk on using an automatic external defibrillator.

Taking workplace safety to heart

By Marnie Douglas

After an employee had a cardiac event at the worksite, Wanes Custom Woodworks wanted to take action and make sure that if it ever happened again, they'd be prepared.

Sudden cardiac arrest can happen anywhere and at any time — and Martin Berryman knows first-hand.

“Every minute is crucial in that situation,” says Berryman, the co-owner and general manager of Wanes Custom Woodworks in Burnaby, recalling the day when he and his colleagues could only watch helplessly and wait for first responders when an employee was having a cardiac event.

Just being in that stressful and worrisome situation provided a compelling case for getting better tools and/or training. The experience was enough to convince Berryman to purchase an automatic external defibrillator (AED) for his woodworking shop.

An AED is a portable and easy-to-use electronic device that assesses the heart of a person in cardiac arrest for a shockable rhythm. It guides the user either to deliver a shock to allow the heart to return to a normal rhythm or to perform CPR until first responders arrive.

AED a worthwhile investment

“Waiting for emergency services to arrive seems like an eternity, and feels worse when you want to help but don't have the tools or the knowledge to help someone who needs it,” he adds.

Berryman reviewed the statistics of having an AED on hand — if defibrillated within the first minute of collapse, the patient's chances of survival increase dramatically. For every minute that defibrillation is delayed, survival rates drop significantly.

“After seeing the stats for the effectiveness of resuscitation versus elapsed time, and realizing how cheap an AED is, I was sold, and so was our entire group,” Berryman adds. “It's an investment of less than \$2,000 that could save a life.”

He made an immediate decision to purchase an AED and train staff on correct usage, in the event that it is needed. Installation and training happened within a week, and he says the positive vibe created by having the AED in place made the purchase all the more worthwhile.

“I was a little struck by the reaction of the employees to be honest. It's like there's peace of mind in the shop.”

He even jokes he's "not getting any younger" and may need the life-saving device one day.

Awarded for safety innovation

The decision to add the life-saving piece of equipment earned Waner Custom Woodworks the WorkSafeBC Safety Innovation Award, from the BC Chapter of the Architectural Woodwork Manufacturers Association of Canada (AWMAC). The award recognizes original programs, policies, tools, or projects in the woodworking industry that assist in reducing workplace injuries.

This year is the second time Waner has been recognized with the Safety Innovation Award, which was started as a means to find innovative solutions to issues in the woodworking industry. In 2016, the company won for using a thermal imaging camera to check all the electrical switches to see if they're running too hot. The scan identified a malfunctioning electrical switch before it resulted in unplanned downtime or a fire. Waner now regularly scans all electrical switches and disconnects within the plant and compares the scan results to a recorded baseline.

The company has also been acknowledged for using a drone to inspect the roof for snow buildup or other debris, rather than having to send someone up a ladder. In addition to these initiatives, there are weekly safety meetings among the 18 employees where they discuss everything from any near-misses to what it means to work safely.

Safety culture takes time

Berryman admits it took a few years and a cultural shift to become a workplace where safety on the job and in the workplace is the number-one priority.

"I've been in this industry 33 years and when I came in, it was a bit of the Wild West. Safety wasn't a consideration or a priority. But when you put what we do into perspective, if employees find themselves putting speed or efficiency ahead of safety, they're really just putting money ahead of safety and that's not right."

Glenda Harskamp, executive director of the AWMAC BC Chapter, describes Waner as a "forward-thinking, innovative company" and one that seeks out safety improvements for its workplace.

"When they see something that will benefit health and safety, they jump on it. In the case of the AED, it's something that they may never need to use but they had the forethought to do the research, look at the need, and make that investment," she explains.

For his part, Berryman says what's key is to "keep an eye open to new ideas and solutions and make sure the priority is always going home safely at the end of the day." ☺



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