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# OH&S INFO LINE

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## Eleven Years in Print:

Purcell Enterprises wants your opinion!

Well, it has been eleven years of publishing this newsletter first in the mail out form and then in the electronic form. I also have over 40 articles on file from my activities writing for this publication, Worksite News, and Corporate Training Monthly. I am thinking of compiling them into a collection ranging from creating incentives that work to dealing effectively with performance issues arising from Drug and Alcohol abuse. Let me know your burning OH&S issues so I can address them. Drop me a line at:

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## Fling Shea

*By Barbara Semeniuk*

I have studied this topic extensively and believe this is the answer to non compliance amongst workers and management to basic Health and Safety principles like the use of Personal Protective Equipment. I have grown tired of sounding like a broken record and acting like a safety cop to no avail.

Fling Shea is an ancient method of using the common Guinea Pig to facilitate good Health and Safety behavior. In my world, I have Edward, the alpha male Guinea Pig in our household. We worship his rotund little form and he demands respect in the form of lettuce, corn, carrots, veggies. In fact the store clerks think I am a vegetarian and eat very, very, well. Of course this is Edwards doing as he consumes copious amounts of the green stuff. I am thinking of breeding his offspring....the glossy red haired Ed to a hairy mottled female...Guinea Pigs breed faster than rabbits.

Once I have assembled my army of Ed and his female companions' offspring I, as the number one Health and Safety consultant in the province of Alberta (all arrogance aside) shall enact Fling Shea.

Fling Shea means I come into a workplace and put up Health and Safety mirrors in breezeways and corners to prevent traffic, pedestrian and assorted wildlife incidents. Then, because water is an essential element in this ancient practice adulterated with copious amounts of carrot juice to turn it orange...the colour of energy and zest! I shall remove the plastic barriers and put up beads made of corn and/or popcorn all the better to facilitate the transfer of positive energy from the universe!

Then in my steel toes and prancing like the Minister of Silly Walks in Monty Python's famous

cameo: I will scatter assorted veggies throughout the plant. Lettuce, I'll say, the colour of money. I will assemble all the non compliant staff and explain green is the colour of money and green begets green (yes I have read the Secret).

Then, like Oliver Twists' Bailiff I will dole out copious amounts of salads as part of the Health and Wellness initiative even though they are a sorry, scurvy, unsafe lot. Grumbling, they will all be seated and forking the salad into their forms when I shall shriek: "Fling Shea!"

My ever compliant daughter (like all teen agers) will gently fling Shea, the firstborn of Ed's and his female companion's army of guineas amongst the scattered greens. With a whistle triumphant and leading his fellow brothers and sisters into the promised land, 10,000 guineas will descend on the transfixed staff fork to mouth as a mottled sea of squeaking, whistling, purring, barking guineas descend on the greens. I will issue speedos to the Guineas brave enough to do laps in the carrot juice, inhaling and squealing as they do so.

The guineas will wreck havoc on unprotected feet as they run, claws clicking on the concrete floor and bat unprotected eyes for the green stuff. Unprotected staff members will learn the importance of PPE and safety glasses can fend off a two pound bouncing guinea...all 100 of them.

Management that fails to enact basic safety principles because we have always done it this way and why break what is not fixed...will encounter the Ninja Guinea. This crack squad...hair bulging from their cute ninja pyjamas will fling the management to the floor where the carpet of guineas will make short work of them. Quivering morasses of jelly in short order that will obey my every command but have a phobia to anything hairy and furry...which means their significant others will either have to be bald or very closely shaven from now on.

Yes, Fling Shea....my secret weapon in the arsenal we Health and Safety professionals must employ when conducting the change process with a little

help from Ed and the Guineas. Many guineas will attend the award ceremony recognizing my contribution to humanity and safety...grooming in the safety mirrors at the plant. These dandies with their duck tailed hair and tuxedos will cut quite a dash may I say...yes, I can see it now...Do I really have to sign this Drug and Alcohol policy?

## No Read and Sign

*By Barbara Semeniuk*

How many of you have been given a 200 page Health and Safety manual and be told to read it? Of course, after you've read it, you are to sign a waiver stating you have read and understood its contents. So you skim through and think I have sufficient work experience...I should know what I am doing...after all now I am responsible if something goes wrong.

An oilfield services company did just that. They gave a large Health and Safety manual to its employees, told them to read it and after they had read it...sign a waiver that they understood its contents. They did no competency checks to determine if the workers actually understood it...but that was ok...the onus was now on the workers.

Not so. This company had a serious incident where a worker did not follow procedure in the correct manner and was hurt very badly. He stated that he had read the safety manual but had not understood it. The Company explained that they had done everything reasonable and practicable to protect the Health and Safety of its workers and the worker in question should have understood the procedure because they had a signed waiver that he had read/understood the Health and Safety manual. The judge asked the question: did you check to make sure he/she actually understood what he/she was reading? No, the answer was, we did not. The onus then, is on you the employer to determine competency and you can't transfer this duty to the worker by having them sign a waiver. They were fined. This set a precedent. Simply handing over Health and

Safety documentation and expecting workers to understand them is no longer acceptable. It is illegal to do so.

In other words, it is the employers duty to ensure that their employees understand what they are reading and this must be assessed either by a quiz that tests key concepts, or by having the worker demonstrate knowledge and competency of procedures on the job under the watchful eye of an experienced worker who signs off that the trainee is competent.

So, then, orientations need to discuss company policies and procedures, talk about critical Health and Safety issues like where the first aid kits, eye washes, fire extinguishers are and what to do in an emergency situation (also who are the first aid attendants etc.). They should have a site tour where the new worker is introduced to his/her fellow employees and/or acquainted with the site Health and Safety precautions and/or hazards. Then you as the employer or his/her representative must check for understanding. A quiz of key concepts that are required by legislation and/or company policy should occur and workers must be able to demonstrate competency on a piece of equipment, tool, or process by their qualifications, experience and/or training.

Mentors are great for assisting in the process: an experienced worker mentors the new worker until the worker can perform the job well, with little or no supervision. The mentor signs off that the worker is competent and the cycle is complete. The company has done everything that a reasonable person would do to protect the Health and Safety of their workers. This is Due Diligence. This prevents fines. This protects the Health and Safety of your workers. So don't read and sign....your life may be on the line!

## Web Notes

Try: [www.SafetyXchange.org](http://www.SafetyXchange.org). This is a wonderful site that contains a wealth of Health and Safety information. It can take hours to explore. Any

question; they have considered it. Have fun exploring this great site!

## Dating and Working as a Health and Safety Professional:

### - Similarities are Painfully Obvious

*By Barbara Semeniuk*

As a middle aged woman who has dated for the past 10 years...has really been 10 years...I was twelve when I got divorced, obviously. Anyways, I have noticed a striking similarity between the process of dating and working in the Health and Safety field.

First...I bring the work "dating disaster" to a whole new level. Being somewhat shy and very scared of the whole process does not help either, falling for charmers sometimes as we all do: men that are handsome, articulate, and always with a tender word or compliment. However, when it comes to phrases like "fidelity, compassion and kindness"; these are qualities that they do not possess. Working as a Health and Safety Professional is a lot like that...the dream job that turns into a nightmare. You start with such high hopes...it sounded so nice with such a lovely title: Health and Safety Manager responsible for Health and Safety. And you are. Whenever, someone gets hurt – it's your fault. You are nothing more than a somewhat highly titled and not necessarily highly paid fall person. You've been "charmed".

Some Health and Safety jobs remind me of the engineer I once dated. We meet at Starbucks in Old Strathcona and my first warning sign of something not quite right was he proceeded to show me, on the first date, pictures of him graduating from university 30 years ago. He was so proud of these pictures...plus the fact, due to traffic, I was five minutes late and he had phoned me on my blackberry 8 times. He took me to the cheapest restaurant in Old Strathcona and proceeded to play games with the waitress moving his coffee cup so she could not fill it. I was

not amused because I had worked my way through university as a waitress and had encountered his type before. He did not leave a tip (they never do) and, as he did not drive, he wanted me to drive him home. I left a tip, told him he was spending challenged and could take the bus home. That should have given him the message that I was not interested in pursuing our relationship, such as it was, any further. However, I had left my card with him and he, for the next week, e-mailed me constantly, phoned my cell and home number and his messages became progressively less polite as I did not respond in a manner he wanted. I call him the “stalker” and myself naive which is a nice word for stupid for giving him my card.

Some Health and Safety jobs are like that...you are responsible for Health and Safety...then Personnel...then Security. Soon 8 hours a day morphs into 16 then 21 and sleep is such an intrusion...all unpaid because you are management and the more you do the more authority and responsibility you get. You cannot perform any of your functions exceptionally well because you have too much on your plate. When you complain: they mention that the last Health and Safety professional never complained...but he/she had a complete breakdown and ended up in an asylum in Ponoka...or they'd still be working there! Such a nice person...but that twitch!

Then there is the dream person that “gets away”. I attended an art auction in Las Vegas and met the man of my dreams: handsome, articulate, witty, funny and I thought, married...that's probably why I was comfortable speaking with him because I am quite shy. Anyway, he was not married and gave me his phone number which, flustered and travelling...I lost.

Then in the club, I am a member of, also has a golf course and an exercise room. Yes, I know, my accountant says I will be eating cat food in my old age...but at least I'll be physically fit viewing all the objects of art I selected at the auction...

burning some of them, I am sure, for heat, but I digress.

Anyways, I had not seen my personal trainer for a month and he worked me, hard. As I was in a hurry I did not dry my hair and my bra was in a plastic bag with my underwear which I had worn while doing chin ups (40) of them upside down while bench pressing 560 pounds...so I exaggerate a little. Who was golfing with friends at the golf course but the dream guy that I lost his number at in Las Vegas. I recognized him, hair dripping wet, red faced and did what my default setting was: I ran, snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. So, if perchance, that nice guy is reading this...my e-mail is [firstbesafe@shaw.ca](mailto:firstbesafe@shaw.ca) and let's talk, eh. But, I think I blew this one!

That is like getting your dream job where Health and Safety is a priority, the workforce is committed and, on your tour, they state your highest values and beliefs. You want it so bad but you have made a commitment to your old job and will stay there because you promised to help out. You will get another opportunity, you hope as good as that one...but you are never really sure...the chemistry was so right!

So in the words of one of my favourite actresses... unfortunately I forget her name. She was thrust into a Thai prison in the movie and was asked how she survived such a horrific experience. In her words: “The Thai prison was better than being single and in the dating scene in London”...just substitute London for Edmonton and there you have it. Enjoy your work as a Health and Safety professional and remember you are making a difference...now, about that dream guy...

