



Business Matters

Encouraging Diversity in the Workplace • Promoting a Positive Environment for Business Growth

Fall/Winter 2001

Is Your Company "Disability Friendly"?



Let others know your company supports diversity! In collaboration with the Virginia Business Leadership Network and area Disability Services Boards, the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) will be launching a new **Disability Friendly Business** campaign in January 2002. Designed to recognize businesses for demonstrating positive business practices in hiring, accommodating, and serving persons with disabilities, the

program provides an opportunity for businesses to receive a "seal of recognition" based on meeting any of the following criteria: 1) *Accessibility*: parking lots, doors, restrooms, accessible service; 2) *Customer-friendliness*: commitment to promoting awareness among its employees of the needs of people with disabilities; and 3) *Employment-friendliness*: commitment to hiring persons with disabilities or aiding employees with disabilities in furthering their careers.

Businesses awarded with this seal will be able to display the decal on their doors, windows, newsletters, brochures, etc. as a symbol to staff, patrons, and others that they not only meet the legal compliances of the ADA, but also embrace a disability friendly attitude toward running their company! Businesses presented with the seal will also have the opportunity to be highlighted in their local newspaper, as well as be eligible for future business awards.

"This is an exciting opportunity for companies to project their positive business practices," said Lieutenant Governor John Hager, spokesman for the Disability Friendly Business Program. "We hope that people will identify the seal as a symbol of business excellence, and will inspire other businesses to adopt the same level of common sense standards in hiring and serving persons with disabilities."

Lieutenant Governor Hager will officially launch the campaign on January 3, 2002 at the General Assembly Building in Richmond. The kick-off will be available for viewing at www.worksupport.com, beginning January 14, 2002. For more information about this program, or to receive a Nomination Packet, please contact Dana Rosanelli at 804/662-7069.

ADA Technical Assistance: CD-ROM

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A Time for Change

Prudential Cleanroom Services was a small, garment processing plant in Sandston, VA, struggling with high employee turnover and low employee morale. But after attending a Metro Richmond Employment Network meeting last February, Prudential realized it was time to change old ways of thinking and focus on a new approach to running business.

In the following months, Prudential implemented the following strategies to make some changes. First, they opened a variety of their positions to more diverse pools of applicants including persons with disabilities, older workers, downsized workers, welfare recipients, and non-English speaking individuals. They also began to work more closely with co-workers and supervisors to create accessible workspaces and positive working environments. Lastly, Prudential held more employee-focused events such as Employee Recognition Luncheons and Employee of the Month Awards to foster greater interaction and communication among staff.

So how does Prudential look now? As a result of the company make-over, Prudential's turnover rate has dropped from 100% to virtually 0%! In fact, headquarters in California are now looking at Prudential's success with hopes of replicating these efforts with their other chains.

"Prudential is an excellent example of how businesses, large or small, can truly make a difference," said Ethel Walker of the Employment Network. "By providing employment opportunities and recognizing cultural differences of persons from various backgrounds, Prudential has not only expanded its workforce, but transformed its entire business culture!"

This past September, Prudential was presented with the Virginia Rehabilitation Association's Norman C. Hammond Award and the 2001 SHRM Diversity Award for their outstanding contributions towards workforce diversity.

"We are committed to excellence in helping all our employees reach their full potential," said Prudential General Manager Elisabeth Knott. "We hope to continue our efforts in proactively identifying change and setting new business standards." ♦

Emergency Evacuation Procedures for Persons with Disabilities

Since the September 11th tragedy, questions and concerns for safety have been on everyone's minds. The following is a checklist from the Job Accommodations Network (JAN) that provide important tips on assisting persons with disabilities in case of an emergency evacuation:

- ✓ Have all employees been consulted and asked to contribute to evacuation and emergency plans?
- ✓ Has a "buddy system" been established where volunteer co-workers can alert and assist people with disabilities in an emergency?
- ✓ Are employees aware of ways to report safety hazards?
- ✓ Are employees encouraged to make a list of medications, allergies, special equipment, names, addresses, and telephone numbers of doctors, pharmacies, family members, friends, and any other important information?
- ✓ Are alternate methods of evacuation practiced and evaluated through announced and surprise drills?
- ✓ Are local fire, police, and rescue departments periodically consulted about issues such as whether people with disabilities should remain in their workplaces, assemble in an area of refuge to await the arrival of rescue workers, or immediately evacuate?
- ✓ Are maintenance activities conducted regularly and evaluated for efficiency and safety?
- ✓ Are pieces of furniture and other items secured to provide multiple barrier-free passages?
- ✓ Are manual pull stations mounted at a height that is within the range of 48 to 54 inches?
- ✓ Is the building in compliance with all federal, state, and local codes?
- ✓ Are lighted fire strobes and other visual or vibrating alerting devices used to supplement audible alarms? Note: Lighted strobes should not exceed five flashes per second due to risk of triggering seizures in some individuals.
- ✓ Have areas of rescue, locations that are relatively safe from immediate danger, been established?
- ✓ Have signs been properly constructed and placed?
- ✓ Are storage areas provided in several accessible areas for emergency supplies, which should include packs or backpacks that attach to walkers, wheelchairs, or scooters? Are storage areas provided for necessary evacuation aids?
- ✓ Have emergency procedures been distributed in Braille, large print, text file, and cassette tape formats?
- ✓ Are employees trained on what evacuation techniques to use, particularly how to carry or assist individuals who use mobility aids, basic sign language to effectively communicate with individuals who are deaf, and the instructions for those individuals who use assistance animals?

*source: www.jan.wvu.edu/corner/index.htm



This issue is dedicated to the victims, families, and heroes touched by the tragic events of Sept 11th.