

NEWS FROM THE OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

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2005 Awards of Excellence Presented for Outstanding Workplace Safety

Lt. Gov. Fallin Praises state Labor Department Staff for Safety Progress

Labor Commissioner Reneau Honors Worker Safety Records of 3 Businesses, One Local Government

OKLAHOMA CITY, May 26 – Thursday, Oklahoma Commissioner of Labor Brenda Reneau hailed Oklahoma employers, both public and private, for significant improvements in health and safety during the past year. While naming the 2005 Award of Excellence recipients, she expressed hope for continued progress in Oklahoma. The commissioner also praised members of the Worker Safety Policy Council (WSPC) for their leadership in attacking health and safety challenges in the Sooner State.

The labor commissioner recognized four Oklahoma employers – one government entity and three businesses based in rural communities – for practical and effective steps taken to improve working conditions and safety for employees. Held in conjunction with the annual Governor’s Safety and Health Conference, the luncheon event featuring the commissioner’s address was sponsored by the Oklahoma Safety Council, a member of the WSPC, a public-private alliance of which Reneau is chairman.

At the conference, Lt. Gov. Mary Fallin praised Commissioner Reneau and her staff, including safety consultation director Diana Jones. Fallin hailed the agency for bringing more Oklahomans to understand that “the best workers’ compensation reform is to prevent injuries in the first place.” Oklahoma is at the national average for work-related illnesses and injuries for the first time since data began to be recorded in 1983. In past years, the state was worse than the national average. In her speech, Fallin repeated her call for comprehensive workers' comp system reforms.

In her speech, the three-term labor commissioner pointed to, “sometimes breath-taking savings in workers compensation premiums and related costs. I’ve said over and over that ‘Safety Pays.’ The cumulative record of workers’ compensation cost reductions in these companies, and in one municipal government, is simply wonderful. The money they save is available for company growth, new investment and a better quality of life in Oklahoma. These employers recognize that safety is not merely a priority, it’s a value that must be included in every aspect of operations,” Reneau said. She continued, “Effective health and safety programs involve both management and employees – and that’s good business. A culture of safety and excellence – and profitability – reflects the daily work life for each of these award recipients.”

Reneau thanked her WSPC members, including Jim Roblyer of CareerTech, Don Powers of the University of Central Oklahoma, Steve Compton of CompSource, Norma Noble of the Commerce Department (who was represented by Jeff Wallace), Clayton Abernathy of OGE, Mayor Chuck Mills of Shawnee, and Gerri Mooney of the Workers’ Comp Court.

Those honored with the 2005 Award of Excellence, and their respective categories, include:

* The prestigious Safety Culture Award went to SKF Sealing Solutions, which also won the Large Employer Award of Excellence for the second consecutive year. Managers at SKF Sealing Solutions, previously known as Chicago Rawhide, attribute the company’s success to the safety consciousness of

employees. For 360 days, the company maintained zero lost workdays from work-related injuries or illnesses. While maintaining 253 good jobs, the company continues to reduce workers' compensation premiums an astonishing 98 percent – from \$124,312 in 2002 to \$2,130 in 2004.

* The city of Edmond received the Public Sector Award of Excellence. Although total city employment has increased slightly since 2002, total workers' compensation costs have plummeted. In 2002, insurance premiums cost the city \$613,109.49. In 2004, costs had dropped to \$60,428.05. "These figures document precisely how much Safety Pays to taxpayers and citizens in this community," Reneau said. She predicted further improvements were within reach, calling on Edmond to continue building on past achievements, including 2003 recognition as an Award of Excellence recipient.

* The Medium Employer Award of Excellence went to Lightning Creek Investment Group, Inc. of Nowata. This two-facility nursing home had zero lost workdays in the last three years, and employment actually increased from 71 in 2002 to 83 in 2004. Since the number of claims were reduced 63 percent in a three year period, workers' compensation premiums dropped by \$43,298. That cost reduction coincided with a drop in claim costs of 99 percent. The Great Plains Care Center is located in Helena, while Cherokee Manor operates in Cherokee.

* Vinita Flag and Apron received the Small Employer Award of Excellence for significant improvements in health and safety this past year. Recordable injuries/illnesses at the company have dropped to zero for lost workdays and total employment stands at 33. The company's turnover rate is only 3%, down dramatically from constant turnover from 1997. Vinita Flag and Apron trimmed workers' compensation insurance premiums from \$48,975 to \$38,846 in the last four years.

Lt. Gov. Fallin presented Oklahoma Safety Council awards at the conference, including awards for excellence in safety and health to Koch Pipeline Company, L.P. Medford Division (small employer), Jencast, of Coffeyville (medium employer) and another recognition to SKF Sealing Solutions (large employer). Each of these honorees were past winners of recognition from the WSPC. Therma Tru Doors of Roland, another past WSPC winner, won the Governor's Pinnacle Award, presented by Fallin on behalf of Gov. Brad Henry, who could not attend.

The 2005 Award of Excellence presentation was held in conjunction with the annual Governor's Safety and Health Conference. The statewide gathering was held May 24-26 at the Clarion Meridian Convention Center in Oklahoma City.

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