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## Main points

We report that the Department of Labour had adequate processes to safeguard public resources and comply with the law.

Also, we describe progress in how the Department helps injured workers with their claims for compensation from the Workers' Compensation Board. The Department has dramatically reduced the length of time that injured workers must wait for assistance. However, the Department has not yet created systems to maintain this success.

We will continue to monitor the Department's actions on our 2003 recommendations.

## Introduction

The Department of Labour (Department) works with employees and employers to promote health and safety, co-operation, fairness, and equity in Saskatchewan workplaces. In co-operation with working people, unions, employers, and other organizations, the Department is responsible to:

- ◆ develop, promote, and enforce the legislative framework for labour relations, labour standards, and occupational health and safety;
- ◆ provide prevention, education, and training services for Saskatchewan workplaces;
- ◆ help prevent and resolve workplace disputes; and
- ◆ develop policies and programs that lead to safe, fair, and productive workplaces.

The following is a list of major programs and spending reported in the Department's 2003-04 Annual Report (see <http://www.labour.gov.sk.ca.>)

	<u>Original Estimates</u>	<u>Actual</u>
	(in millions of dollars)	
Occupational Health and Safety	\$ 5.0	\$ 5.1
Labour Support Services	2.7	2.5
Administration	1.1	1.2
Labour Standards	1.8	1.6
Accommodation and Central Services	1.4	1.3
Other	<u>2.2</u>	<u>2.1</u>
	<u>\$ 14.2</u>	<u>\$ 13.8</u>

## Our audit conclusions and findings

**In our opinion, for the year ended March 31, 2004:**

- ◆ **the Department had adequate rules and procedures to safeguard public resources; and**

- ♦ **the Department complied with authorities governing its activities relating to financial reporting, safeguarding public resources, revenue raising, spending, borrowing, and investing.**

The remainder of this chapter describes the Department's progress up to October 2004 to provide timely help to workers to claim compensation for workplace injuries.

## **Worker's advocates assist injured workers—a follow-up**

One of the mandates of the Department is to assist injured workers who seek help to claim compensation from the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB). The Department carries out this mandate through the Office of the Worker's Advocate.

For over a decade, the Department did not provide timely service to workers. At one point, injured workers waited up to two years for help with their claims for compensation. Prior to 2003, as many as 600 workers were waiting for assistance.

In 2003, we audited the Department's processes to assist workers (or their dependants) who seek help with their claims for compensation from the WCB. In Chapter 8 of our 2003 Report – Volume 3, we reported our audit results. We concluded that the Department had adequate processes to assist workers who seek help with their claims for compensation from WCB, except for the two areas where we made recommendations.

We recommended that the Department set clear expectations for assistance to injured workers, align resources with its expectations, and monitor achievement of its expectations. On June 30, 2004, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed with our recommendations.

The following sets out our specific recommendations in italics and related actions by the Department to address them.

### **Improve processes to assist workers with claims**

*In 2003, we recommended the Department should improve its processes to assist workers with their claims for compensation. The improvements*

*should include setting clear performance expectations and aligning resources to meet them.* For example, we expected the Department to set expectations for the nature and quality of worker's advocate services and how long injured workers would wait for assistance.

### ***Set performance expectations***

Starting in late 2002, the Department began to improve its processes to help workers claim compensation related to workplace injuries. The Department revised how it expected staff to carry out their work. It documented the new procedures in memoranda. The Department plans to develop a procedure manual in future. By October 2004, injured workers waited six weeks for help with their claims.

The Department noted that during April to October 2004, the number of injured workers asking for help with their claims rose sharply. The Department estimates the number of requests for help in 2004-05 could be up to 50% more than in 2003-04. The additional demand may be due to high injury rates, more referrals, or other factors.

The Department has not identified the quality or timeliness that it expects worker's advocate services can reasonably provide on an ongoing basis. The Department's performance plan sets out objectives and measures for other parts of the Department. The performance plan does not mention the Office of the Worker's Advocate.

### ***Align resources with expectations***

During 2003 and 2004, the Department dramatically shortened the length of time that injured workers wait for help with their claims (e.g., from 25 months in April 2003 to 6 weeks in October 2004). The Department achieved this more timely service by reallocating existing resources and streamlining its procedures.

The Department continues to search for efficient ways to use its resources. In addition, the Department has estimated the resources required if the demand for Worker's Advocate services continues to rise. However, without specific performance expectations, the Department has few guidelines to decide what resources are reasonable to provide timely worker's advocate services.

## **Monitor and review performance**

*In 2003, we recommended the Department should improve its processes to monitor the achievement of its performance expectations for worker's advocate services. The improvements should include the regular review of written analysis of performance, for example by senior managers.*

The Department needs to set clear expectations before it can monitor the performance of the Office of the Worker's Advocate in a meaningful way.

The Department's senior managers receive written and verbal monthly reports from the Office of the Worker's Advocate. The written reports document the number of workers waiting and the timeliness of service. The reports compare performance to the prior month, but do not show trends or other analysis of performance.

## **Further Department action necessary**

The Department significantly reduced the length of time that injured workers must wait for assistance. We congratulate it for this success.

The Department has not yet created systems to maintain this success. The Department needs specific expectations, aligned resources, and a regular review by its senior managers of written progress reports that analyze progress toward expectations.

Without systems to set expectations and monitor performance trends, the Department may risk a return to long waiting periods for injured workers to get help with their claims to WCB. We will continue to monitor the Department's actions on the recommendations we made in 2003.