



Eastern Ontario's Best Kept Secret: HELPING BUSINESSES MAKE WORKPLACES SAFE

By **Courtney Tait** Photos **Stephen Wild**

If you're a business owner, creating a safe and healthy work environment is essential. But while most Kingston business owners want their employees to work safely, many don't know what practices to follow, or that their workplace must meet the Occupational Health and Safety and Employment Standards legislation.

Wilkins Health & Safety Solutions — a consulting firm founded by Occupational Health and Safety consultant Wiebke Wilkens — guides businesses through the process of fostering a workplace that's safe and compliant with provincial and federal requirements.

"A lot of businesses aren't in compliance and don't realize they need to be," says Wilkens. "We provide business owners and their management teams with the guidance they need."

Wilkens and her team provide unique solutions customized to their clients' needs, including health and safety system evaluations, health and safety program development, human resource manual development and customized training sessions. "We provide custom program development and hands-on training where clients can ask questions and learn how the legislation applies to their work environment," says Wilkens.

Wilkens has worked in the health and safety field for more than 25 years in both public and private sectors. She founded Wilkens Health & Safety Solutions in 2001 with a focus on helping small and medium sized businesses that don't have access to the same resources large companies use, to ensure they are complying with safety legislation.

"Owners of small and medium sized businesses wear a lot of hats — from human resources to marketing — with their primary focus being on delivering their services," says Wilkens. "Health and safety

is a piece of that, but a lot of businesses put it to the side. I saw that as a niche service in the Kingston community."

Wilkens serves a diverse clientele from educational institutions, construction firms, restaurants, retail businesses, the professional health community and almost everything in between. The firm's team is made up of experts in the Occupational Health and Safety and Employment Standards fields. They also have access to a vast pool of industry resources they refer clients to when the in-house expertise is not available.

Wilkens emphasizes it has become increasingly important to have health and safety documentation in place for the Ministry of Labour, which has the right to enter any workplace at any time, unannounced. They may check for compliance under the Health and Safety Act, as well as Employment Standards legislation. "They go into enforcement mode or can issue Stop Work orders," says Wilkens. "We help businesses prevent that from occurring."

As the president of the not-for-profit organization Kingston: Partners for a Safe Community, Wiebke has been a leading force in getting Kingston designated as a safe community by Parachute, a national injury prevention organization. Wilkens Health and Safety Solutions is also the corporate sponsor of Kingston's Safety Groups Program, a WSIB initiative to help eliminate workplace injuries and illnesses in Ontario.

Wilkens says one of the most fulfilling parts of her work is seeing the look of understanding on her clients' faces. "Businesses who may be reluctant at first embrace it and understand why it's important," says Wilkens. "We become a part of their team." ■

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