

# Quitting Time

*Burnsville employer uses classes and support to reduce tobacco-using employees by 20 percent.*

**T**obacco was smoked or chewed by nearly half of the 40 employees at Rigid Hitch, a Burnsville manufacturer, in early 2010. Tobacco use may not have been the only contributor to the company's annual increases of 15 to 30 percent in health care claims. But using tobacco is a lifestyle choice that puts them at risk for poor health—and Rigid Hitch wanted to help them quit, which also might help level out increases in health care premiums for employers and employees.

People at Rigid Hitch, like many Minnesotans, benefit from the services and funding provided by Statewide Health Improvement Program and its county-based public health partners. To foster better health, SHIP strives to reduce tobacco use and tobacco exposure and reduce the number of people who are overweight or obese.

Rigid Hitch connected initially when Betsy Kauffman, human resources manager, completed a Dakota County survey about potential ways to improve employee wellness and health. A Dakota county staff person followed up with no-cost ideas and suggestions for improvement. "They let us know about the resources that were available and brought them to us," Kauffman says. "As a smaller employer, I really appreciated their efforts because we don't have the resources to go out searching for these solutions."

Dakota County Community Health Specialist Efren Maldonado suggested to Kauffman that Quitplan was not only a phone and web program to help tobacco users but also would send a representative to the company to counsel tobacco users in how to quit.

Eight employees chose to enroll in the program and Rigid Hitch arranged for them to meet for one-hour sessions for five weeks—on company time—with the Quitplan counselor. This counselor formerly smoked, so she could sympathize with the employees' struggle to quit tobacco.

Along with Rigid Hitch's investment in employee wellness, SHIP resources supported tobacco use screening, as well as incentives for employees who remained tobacco-free.

Four of those in the program cut back their tobacco use. Of the four employees who quit using tobacco, one for the first winter in many years did not suffer a bout of bronchitis. She is healthier and did not have to take time off from work to recover.

Kauffman is pleased with the results—that a significant number of Rigid Hitch's employees chose to go smoke-free, with assistance from SHIP. ●

