

St. Francis of Bellingham Achieves WHCA Gold Level Safety Award for Second Year in a Row and Washington Labor & Industries Blueprint for Safety Certificate

St. Francis of Bellingham earned the Washington Health Care Association (WHCA) Gold Level Safety Award for its success in reducing staff injuries and increasing focus on staff safety through the Self-Assessment For Employee Safety and Training (SAFEST) program. This is the second year in a row the skilled nursing center (located at 3121 Squalicum Pkwy) has achieved this recognition, making the senior care center one of the top safety facilities for employees in the state. “We have a personal responsibility and accountability for our own safety and for the safety of our co-workers. We are proud that our hard work to provide even better staff safety has been recognized by the state and WHCA,” says Tonja Myers, Administrator.

In 2009, the WHCA Group Retro Committee and Employer Resources Northwest (ERNWest) introduced the SAFEST program. The goal of the program is to provide long-term care providers with a simple and effective method of evaluating major components of workplace safety and workers’ compensation cost control programs. There are three levels of participation, Introductory (baseline), Silver (intermediate with measured improvement) and Gold (excellent safety and worker’s compensation programs).

St. Francis of Bellingham has continued its dedication to employee safety by contracting with ERNWest to conduct a series of classes designed to help staff members stay safe. “I jumped at the chance to give our staff members more tools to keep them safe,” says Myers. The classes included:

- Working with Combative Residents
- Safety in the Kitchen, Laundry, and Housekeeping
- Slips, Trips and Falls
- Patient Transfers

In 2012 and 2013, St Francis of Bellingham achieved “Gold Level” status in SAFEST. Currently, St. Francis of Bellingham is one of only two facilities in the state that qualify for Gold level status.

Blueprint for Safety Certificate presented by the Washington Department of Labor & Industries.

The Blueprint for Safety program, established by the Washington Department of Labor & Industries, recognizes employers who are committed to continuous improvement and excellence in the areas of accident prevention, returning injured employees to work, and human resources. The program offers training and resources to help senior care facilities focus on staff safety and reduce injury rates.

Steven Lewis, Safety Coordinator for St. Francis, attributes the safety recognition to the ongoing staff education at St. Francis of Bellingham. “We’re always looking for ways to improve and it’s such a big help that the state offers these resources. Travis Tomulty with the Blueprint program was instrumental in providing the support we needed to achieve our safety goals.”

The certificate was given to St. Francis of Bellingham in recognition of its continued employee safety improvements while the senior care facility earned the WHCA ERNwest Gold Level Safety awards. In order to qualify for the Blueprint for Safety program, participants agree to:

- Attend an initial meeting between L&I and the CEO to agree upon Blueprint principles.
- Develop yearly written safety goals.
- Attend supervisory training modules.
- Attend quarterly meetings.

“One of the themes we learned from the Blueprint for Safety trainers is that we are all responsible for sending every employee home safe and sound after each shift,” says Lori Cowdrey, Human Resources Manager. “When you approach employee safety in a way that says “I care” rather than “you’re in trouble” it’s far more effective. Our industry has one of the highest injury rates of any industry, so it’s paramount that we focus on keeping our employees safe and sound. We want long-term, happy and healthy employees.”