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By: Cathy Spaulding, Phoenix Staff Writer

Program highlights healthy businesses

Muskogee area employers say they see the benefits of a state program that honors healthy businesses.

“Any time you can focus on improving the healthy of employees, your business improves,” said Rebecca Smith, compliance officer with Muskogee County Emergency Medical Service.

The Emergency Medical Service is one of a growing number of Oklahoma employers recognized as Certified Healthy Businesses.

The Oklahoma Certified Healthy Business Program seeks to recognize employers who provide health and wellness opportunities for their employees. The health initiative is sponsored by the Oklahoma Academy for State Goals, Oklahoma Turning Point Council, State Chamber of Commerce and the Oklahoma State Department of Health. The Oklahoma Turning Point Council is a state program dedicated to improving public health.

Applications for being certified as a 2010 Healthy Business are available on the Oklahoma Turning Point Council website. Applications are due Nov. 15.

Employers don't have to be healthy-oriented to be Healthy Businesses, said Tammy Randazzo, Oklahoma Turning Point Council's regional field consultant.

“We have fast food restaurants to elementary schools to colleges,” she said. The list of 2009 Certified Healthy Businesses includes the Cherokee Nation, a human resources agency in Oklahoma City and school districts in Bristow, Agra and Canton.

Benefits for being certified go beyond state-level recognition, Randazzo said. “You will get feedback on where you rank as a healthy business and advice on how to encourage more work site wellness.”

To become a Certified Healthy Business, businesses fill out an application with questions about their health policies. For example, does the business offer screening for blood pressure or cholesterol, free or reduced cost physical exams for employees, cardiovascular fitness evaluations. Another question asks what health information materials or programs the business provides. Businesses also fill out what type of physical activities such as fitness rooms or breaks they offer. They also fill out information on tobacco prevention policies.

Smith said Muskogee County EMS offers employees memberships to area fitness centers.

The EMS also offers free flu shots and tuberculosis testing for employees and has conducted smoking cessation programs. Posters promoting healthy eating through the “food pyramid” are posted in the break room, Smith said.

One way the city of Muskogee seeks to be a Certified Healthy Business is to reimburse employees' membership in the Muskogee Swim and Fitness Center. The city operates the center but charges for membership and individual visits.



Muskogee County Emergency Medical Service compliance officer Rebecca Smith gives a flu shot to Emergency Medical Technician basic Dianna Summerlin. Offering in-house flu shots is one way the EMS seeks to be a healthy business.

“We reimburse the paid memberships if they go eight times through the month,” said Muskogee Parks and Recreation Department Director Mark Wilkerson.

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