

Occidental Oil and Gas Corporation

A subsidiary of Occidental Petroleum Corporation

Houston, Texas

Occidental Petroleum Corporation, is an international oil and gas exploration and production company. In 2008, based on market capitalization, Occidental Petroleum Corporation (Oxy) was the fourth largest U.S. oil and gas company. Oxy employs 10,000 employees worldwide with 7,000 employees based in the United States. The company workforce is predominantly male.

About 10 years ago, mothers in the Oil and Gas Division who were returning to work after pregnancy requested a lactation support program. This division is approximately 16% women and 7% are of childbearing age, defined as women born between 1964 and 1990. At the program's inception, Oxy created a written lactation policy and conducted a needs assessment of breastfeeding employees. One of the early program challenges was finding a room that had a lock, electricity, AC/heat, a computer connection and a nearby water source. The costs to begin and maintain the lactation program were minimal and were absorbed in the occupational health budget.

Oxy's lactation spaces and amenities developed over time. The first space available for breastfeeding mothers was actually a file room. Privacy screens, chairs, a refrigerator and blankets were provided. Next, the company decided to create a room designated for lactation only. The room is located near the kitchen, the restroom and the occupational health manager's office (in case assistance was needed).

Since some of the company's field sites are too small to have a designated lactation room, they created site-specific lactation areas. Oxy's Occupational Health Department is available to assist with suggestions and resources.

Program Components:

Private Area to Express Milk: Lactation areas can be made available in any company location nationwide. The larger sites have Mothers' Rooms with key access for nursing mothers. Amenities include a table, a comfortable chair or recliner, a telephone, laptop connections, a radio/CD player, relaxation CDs, germicidal cleaner, a nearby water source, bottled water, a small refrigerator for storing milk, a back-up cooler, a clock, a calendar, reading materials, hand sanitizer lotion and paper towels. In each Mothers' Room, there is an "etiquette" poster with information on emergency phone numbers, room scheduling rules, milk storage safety guidelines and hygiene/sanitation requirements.

Breastfeeding Equipment: Oxy does not provide breastfeeding equipment. Each employee brings her own pump. Women can store breastfeeding pumps inside the lactation rooms to avoid transporting them to and from work each day.

Milk Expression Scheduling: Employees express milk during designated breaks as agreed with their supervisor. Work schedules and lunch breaks can be adjusted to accommodate pumping. Currently, lactation areas can be available nationwide. At the largest sites, there are designated Mother's Rooms and mothers complete scheduling requests online using an Outlook calendar.

Education & Support: A journal is kept in each lactation room for mothers to share stories and ask questions, providing informal mother-to-mother support. Lactation support, such as access to a lactation consultant, may be available through the company's health insurance providers. In addition, the company offers referrals to public/private community resources. Additionally, pre-pregnancy educational programs are available through health benefits providers for those employees who are enrolled.

Oxy does not use a formal program communications strategy to publicize its lactation program, however, the program has increased in popularity, mostly by word of mouth. The lactation room is available for any Oxy nursing mother including employees' family members and visiting clients. The short-term disability manager informs mothers returning to work of the lactation program. In addition, supervisors contact the occupational health manager to notify the manager of employees who may want to use the room upon returning to work. Mothers who are ill may not use the Mothers' Rooms.

Program participants are e-mailed biannually to evaluate their satisfaction with the program. In addition, Oxy's worksite breastfeeding support policy is reviewed periodically for effectiveness and necessary changes. Since Oxy's health promotion strategy is based on individualized health and wellness, the lactation support program is constantly evolving to fit the needs of breastfeeding employees.

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) recognizes companies as "Mother-Friendly Worksites" if they provide accommodations for new mothers returning to work who desire to continue breastfeeding. When Oxy's headquarters in Houston was recognized as a "Mother-Friendly Worksite" in July 2003, the company became one of the first oil companies to win this honor.

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Workplace Breastfeeding Programs: Employer Case Studies

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- Identifies strategies and develops tools to address health and benefits issues.
- Translates health research into practical solutions for large employers.
- Provides the national voice for large employers and links them with national expertise and resources.

For more information, e-mail healthservices@businessgrouphealth.org.

Issue Brief

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About the National Business Group on Health

The Business Group is the only non-profit organization devoted exclusively to representing large employers' perspectives on national health issues and providing solutions to its members' most important health care and health benefits challenges. The Business Group fosters the development of a safe health care delivery system and treatments based on scientific evidence. Members share strategies for controlling costs, improving patient safety and quality of care, increasing productivity and supporting healthy lifestyles.

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