

National Safety Month

June 2011

June is a month highly celebrated in the safety industry as “National Safety Month.” Every year safety professionals gear up to get the word out on safety at home and at work and try to bring their ideas to the willing as a way to reduce injuries through education. This week (June 5-11) is focused on prevention of injuries resulting from overexertion.



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Newsletter Spotlight

“Overexertion injuries can be devastating to both companies and workers.”

The first step to prevention is education on proper lifting techniques. The methodology for proper lifting has been common knowledge for most, but followed by just a few; Keep the load close to the body, lift with the legs (not the back), and be careful not to twist or bend the back while carrying a load. Identifying poor technique is easy, but monitoring each worker, every minute of every day is not. It is up to each individual to make the right choice, but it is up to management to ensure they are educated and knowledgeable of what the right choices are. Getting buy-in and acceptance from workers is crucial here. The simplest method is to put the consequences on the injury squarely on the shoulders of the work, by stressing the long term effects of a serious overexertion injury. Usually, this means a lifetime of reoccurring injuries and inability to perform not only work, but recreational activities as well.

The next step is to teach workers to be knowledgeable about their own capabilities. Not everyone is able to lift the same weights. Finding a set limit on what is or is not acceptable may prove difficult, especially since there are high degrees of variation between individuals. I prefer what we refer to as the “airport rule.” This is in reference to the regulations by most airlines on checked baggage. When traveling, bags are checked and weighed. If the bag is under 50 lbs, a standard baggage fee applies. If it ranges from 50-75 lbs, an overweight fee applies. If the bag is over 75 lbs, it is usually shipped as cargo, with a completely different rate. This rule is in effect to prevent baggage handlers from lifting more than 50 lbs repeated, up to 75 lbs on occasion, and never anything over. It is an excellent policy to put into place for any company.

In conclusion what we will discuss is prevention through good management. It is recommended that supervisors understand basic guidelines for preventing overexertion and follow up by making changes where they are needed. For instance if employees are required to move large or heavy loads, how could they be broken down into smaller loads or could they be moved using different methods. In many cases, a crew may not have the equipment needed to make this possible, so supervisors need to use some foresight in determining what workers will need to make their jobs easier. Any field employee will tell you that they will perform their job and tasks regardless if they have the right tools and equipment. This is especially true with lifting and overexertion situations. If a worker doesn’t have a cart or wheelbarrow, they will move the material by any means necessary. It is a supervisor’s job to prevent this from happening and a workers responsibility to communicate the needs up the chain of command.

Overexertion injuries can be devastating to both companies and workers. Easy steps to prevention include educating employees, setting good policies, and making sure supervisors are involved in the process. Creating an environment of acceptance can best be done by relating the reasoning and consequences in clear, real-world terms. Any injury can result in a lifetime of pain and inability to enjoy the latter years of one’s life. It’s imperative that good management practices be used to avoid this pain.