



Public Sector Safety Talks: APERMA

Back Injuries – Get Your Workers Back in Control



Jokes about nagging back pain may get standup comedians lots of laughs, but back strains and sprains are not funny at all, nor should they be an unavoidable curse to anyone.

The cost of back injuries suffered in workplaces last year added up to millions of dollars. Those disabling back injuries were no laughing matter for the workers who lost time from work and their personal activities. The sad truth is that most of the pain and lost time could have been prevented if workers had been made more aware of how their backs function and how to safely lift bulky or heavy loads.

The back is a complex network of fragile ligaments, discs and muscles which can easily be thrown out of alignment. The back's design breaks down when it is forced to perform activities it was not designed to do.

One sure way to injure the back is to lift heavy or bulky loads improperly or unassisted. The unsupported back cannot operate like a derrick or a crane boom. Lifting with a twisted or bent back is an invitation for a pulled muscle or ruptured disc. The back can be damaged quickly but can take a long time to heal. Workers should be encouraged to do their lifting with good sense and a little extra help from a co-worker or mechanical aid.

Proper lifting techniques can prevent injuries. Workers should be taught to squat over the item to be lifted, and face it squarely. In this position, the back gets added lifting strength and power from the legs and arms. Teach

workers to tilt the item on edge with its long axis straight up so the center of the weight is as high as possible above the ground. Next, the worker should move up close to the item, because the backbone must act as a supporting column, and it takes the least strain when close to the object. Still squatting, the feet should be set with legs pointed right at the load, with the back straightened, the worker may then grasp the load with both arms and slowly stand up with it.

A good way to train workers to lift correctly is by practicing lifting correctly with light loads. They will notice that the correct way to lift is the easiest way to lift the load, with the least strain on the back. Lifting the wrong way will, over time, cause injury and pain and then no one will be laughing.

Any questions or concerns about the above material, please feel free to contact Jim Bergemann or Kathi Williams 800-274-2788

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