

Manager/Supervisor Risk Management

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A twice weekly e-mail training for YCPARMIA members

TOPIC: SAFETY –MATCHING PREVENTION TO INJURIES - CONTINUED

This topic continues and expands on the last topic which stated the concept that an injury/accident should trigger a loss prevention response by the manager/supervisor that targets all employees, not just the injured worker. Any injury should be considered a big deal that requires responsive action by management. The goal is to prevent similar accidents/injuries from occurring to someone else.

A repetitive motion injury is a good example of this approach. YCPARMIA gets a steady flow of tendonitis injuries to wrists and hands caused by excessive or improper use of computers. Sometimes there are additional aggravating factors like lifting heavy files, filing papers, or ten-keying. In the worst-case scenarios the tendonitis becomes carpal tunnel syndrome, and requires expensive surgery that leaves the worker with permanent disability and work restrictions.

The standard narrow response that we see from management is to request an ergonomic study on the injured worker's work station. Adjustments and updated equipment is then provided, and the worker is hopefully less exposed to injury. Unfortunately, the worker often needs the safer environment because their injury often predisposes them to additional injury. In effect, this response is to prevent re-injury or aggravation of this specific existing injury, not to prevent new injuries.

The recommended response to a single injury would be much broader and might include:

- Have ergonomic inspections immediately done on all of your workstations. It is surprising how often one ergonomic injury leads to another in the same unit, until you remember that the people are often doing the same thing in the same environment.
- Train your supervisors on ergonomics and body mechanics. Repetitive motion injuries require repetition – they occur over a long time. Intervention during the build-up to injury can avoid that injury; give your supervisors the skills they need to recognize developing problems.
- Train all workers on proper body mechanics, and to recognize warning signs of developing injury. Be sensitive and responsive to their comments and complaints; these are red flags.
- Look at your work processes. Often things are done in a certain way because they have always been done that way. That does not make them the safest or even smartest way. Get worker input into the processes – they are the experts, and should recognize the body stressors in the current process.
- Protect the workers from themselves. Repetitive motion injuries usually require the worker to disregard warning signs, and after injury we often see them disregard corrections and return to the same bad practices that led to the original injury.
- Request that your Safety Committee schedule your worksite for a premises inspection.

Again, the goal is to prevent the next injury, not just to address the injury that has already occurred.

Next Topic: Safety – Matching Prevention to Injuries - continued