

Manager/Supervisor Risk Management

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A twice weekly e-mail training for YCPARMIA members

TOPIC: SAFETY –MATCHING PREVENTION TO INJURIES - TRAINING

A common mistake made by supervisors is to measure their response to an injury based on its severity. With the significant majority of employee injuries being minor, and concluding with little or no cost, there appears to be little justification for preventive action. Staff is busy enough doing their work without taking on activity that appears to have marginal value.

Unfortunately this ignores an underlying truth. There are too many variables to predict what kind of injury will result from any given accident. The same mechanism can cause greatly different results. One office worker with a repetitive injury will need surgery to repair their carpal tunnel syndrome, while the person sitting next to them will have full recovery with ice and rest. A rear-ended car with two employees in it might result with one having a stiff neck, while the other has a herniated disc. Since you cannot predict the severity, and potential cost, it is necessary to respond to all accidents based on their potential.

The potential impact of a workers' compensation injury can fall anywhere between no cost to millions of dollars. Given the range, the best we can do is to talk about an average; based on thirty-five years of claim history, YCPARMIA's average workers' compensation claim cost is \$5,660. This means that every time an employee is injured there will be a wide range of possibilities, but on average there will be significant costs incurred, and we usually won't know which claims will skew our average. This difficulty to predict potential means that management should consider any accident/injury a big deal that requires responsive action to prevent similar injuries in the future.

An employer cannot "un-ring the bell," but can use the injury/accident to target prevention efforts. Again, we are not just talking about re-educating the injured worker; we want to make sure that others in the same environment don't suffer the same accident/injury. If it can happen to one, it can happen to any – and too often does. YCPARMIA sees repeated patterns of injury in the same departments, and in the same units, but the supervisors are often treating these injuries as unique events.

As a general rule, it would be appropriate for a supervisor, or Safety Committee, to require a short, targeted training for the entire work unit following every work injury. Discussion of how the injury occurred, applicable employer policies, industry practices, and pertinent safety practices could all be used to educate and increase awareness, and evidence the importance that management places on injury prevention in enhancing a safety culture. Instead, the current common response is to admonish the injured worker to be more careful, or treat the accident as "unpreventable," with little done to prevent the next similar injury.

Next Topic: Safety – The Costs of Injury