



SAFETY SHARE OF THE MONTH

OVEREXERTION IN THE WORKPLACE

Employees who do physically demanding work may be working too hard and putting themselves at risk of injuries from overexertion. Overexertion injuries are costly because there are so many of them and because they often involve days away from work. Estimates place the total cost to employers at over \$10 billion annually. Another important fact about overexertion injuries is that they are preventable. It takes training, policies, procedures, and employee involvement to make an overexertion prevention program work.

IDENTIFY OVEREXERTION RISKS

Once you have pinpointed the risks, you can modify workstations, job procedures, and the work environment to minimize the risks. Storing heavy items low to avoid excessive reaching and strain; reducing the depth of shelves to reduce overreaching; and modifying the work environment to reduce the need for twisting, bending, and other awkward postures.

PROVIDE LIFTING AIDS

Manual and powered lifting aids reduce the strain on human bodies and greatly reduce the risk of overexertion in many material handling tasks. Examples would be forklifts.

PROHIBIT SOLO LIFTING OF HEAVY LOADS

Recommend a 50-pound limit for solo lifting. More than that and employees should be required to get help or use a lifting aid. Lifting or carrying loads that weigh 50 pounds or more increases a person's risk for a serious back injury.

INCLUDE LIFTING POLICIES IN JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Include lifting requirements in the job description so that these requirements will be taken into account when hiring new workers.

REQUIRE FREQUENT SHORT BREAKS

A study conducted by NIOSH indicates that workers who do a lot of lifting should take frequent breaks to relax tired, tense muscles and reduce the risk of injury, particularly back injury.

PERFORM REGULAR AUDITS

Studies show that frequent and unannounced audits by management and supervisors will greatly reduce safety issues like overexertion. Review audit results with team supervisors and create a "Critical Risk Assessment" document for high risk jobs and tasks.



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