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ERGONOMICS

Check Here for an Ergonomic Workplace



An ergonomic office environment can result in less time devoted to sick days and less chance of chronic disability.



STAFF TRAINING

Training for Prevention is the Key to Healthier Work Environments

Dennis Downing looks at one company that benefitted from an exercise in safe work habits

NO ONE DELIBERATELY sets out to get a back injury just so he or she can take worker's compensation leave. Back injuries and repetitive motion injuries are debilitating and long-term, and the resulting pain and suffering is not something to be taken lightly. But these kinds of injuries do happen and worker's compensation claims are paid. The good news is that they are preventable, and more and more organizations are taking steps to protect their employees' health and their company's bottom line.

Waste Management of Orange County, Inc., in California, took a look at its rate of on-the-job injuries and decided to make an investment in employee safety, reduce worker's compensation costs, and increase productivity by keeping people at work rather than out due to injury. Six months after implementing an injury prevention program, Waste Management of Orange County has not had a single back injury. And it's not just backs that reap the benefit of using proper biomechanical technique - shoulders, knees, necks, and wrists are other injury-prone areas for these employees.

Of course, it takes more than the support of management to see significant change. Waste Management realized that without the support and commitment of their workers, they wouldn't see the results they hoped for. This is why they wanted a program that incorporated both an education and behavior-based training module that would ensure active employee participation. In addition, the program had to address the specific tasks performed by their employees.

Future Industrial Technology's BACKSAFE program met Waste Management's criteria. William Cowdrey, an



Proper techniques for bending and lifting can save money and employee injuries.

F.I.T. - certified Industrial Injury Prevention Consultant, had to design a program specifically for the kinds of activities Waste Management workers encountered on a daily basis. The job requires lots of lifting - as many as 1,500 heavy trash cans a day - as well as bending and pushing, and Cowdrey started with hands-on research by following a team of employees around for several days, observing the basic tasks they performed and the techniques they used.

The program can't change the environment in which the employees must work, so the focus is placed instead on changing the employee's patterns of movement. The training session Cowdrey developed included a series of stretching exercises, techniques to reduce the stress the job can place on the body, and ways to vary movements throughout the day to reduce repetitive injuries. The key to the program, however, is that participants actually have to perform all of the different techniques taught during the training session to demonstrate their understanding. An obstacle course was set up, filled with items employees encountered in the workplace. Consultants watched them maneuver objects, step on or over low barriers like curbs, bend down to pick something up, and then helped them make adjustments to their movements as needed. Thus workers feel confident that they can take responsibility for their safety. A run-through of the stretching exercises - both the warm-up and intermittent routines - helped demonstrate how they could be used along the route during the day.

Long-time employees who took part in the training were surprised that they learned things that made their

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STAFF TRAINING

3-Minute Workout & Microbreaks

Neck Stretches



Bend head downward, and gently upward.

Slowly and

fully turn head to one side three times, then the other. Side bend the neck toward shoulder, hold, then look down.

Back Extensions



After sitting for a while, and especially prior to lifting or bending, place your hands on

the lower back, gently push forward, raise the chest upward and arch back.



Chest and Shoulder Stretch

Clasp hands behind back and slowly straighten the arms. Arch your back upwards. Sitting

forward in the seat or standing up may help.

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jobs easier, and found they had more energy at the end of the day. Many were skeptical about participating in one more training program, and thought lifting, bending, and pushing correctly would slow them down. They were surprised that it didn't, and that in fact, the training helped. Most of us are never taught how to move correctly to protect ourselves in every day life, let alone job-specific ergonomics.

People learn best by doing. You can't teach a physical activity effectively with just a lecture and a video. A person can watch a golf video and read the rules of

the game but that's no guarantee he or she can swing the golf club correctly and effectively. It takes practice, and even the most gifted, natural athlete can learn something from the professional. By doing, people become involved in the process, pay more attention, and remember more of what they learn.

A final aspect that is a vital to any injury prevention program is follow-up. F.I.T. has a procedure in place that ensures employees don't forget the techniques they have learned. It works with supervisors to develop programs to reinforce these safety measures, teaches them how to do an evaluation and conduct reg-

ular safety meetings, and how to create incentive programs.

The Waste Management of Orange County should be commended for its commitment to the safety of its employees. Programs like BACKSAFE can make a difference in the workplace.

Dennis Downing is President of Future Industrial Technologies (F.I.T.), a network of consultants throughout the United States and Canada that provides training in the BACKSAFE™ and SITTINGSAFE™ programs for companies and organizations both large and small. They can be contacted at (800) 775-2225 or www.backsafe.com.

Hand & Wrist Stretches



Caution: This must be done slowly and with minimal force. Hold each stretch for five seconds.

1. Palm up with elbow at side and forearm level with ground. Hold fingers and gradually pull down and back.
2. Gently pull thumb down.
3. Return to fingers. Gently hold as you slowly straighten your arm.
4. Arm straight, turn palm down and gently pull fingers down and back. Bend elbow, palm down, pull fingers down and back. Switch hands.

Above tips and images courtesy of Future Industrial Technologies. ■