

# Safety Topic

Safety News

State Compensation Insurance Fund

Issue Two, 2009



## Avoid Bites And Stings

**M**ost times a bite or a sting causes an irritating itch or stinging sensation with mild swelling that disappears within a day or so. But for some people who have an allergic reaction, the bite or sting can cause severe discomfort or be life threatening. Understand when and where you are at risk for a sting or bite; know how to protect or treat them; and if you recognize an adverse health reaction, seek medical attention immediately. Your life may depend on it.

**Bees, wasps, and yellow jackets:** Bright clothes and colognes attract these insects. Wear gloves, lightweight longed sleeved shirts and long pants. If you're stung, remove the stinger then apply a disinfectant and cold compress. If you notice breathing problems, swelling of the lips or throat, faintness, confusion, rapid heartbeat or hives after a sting, get immediate medical help! It could be life threatening.

**Spiders:** Most spider bites are harmless, but some, such as the brown recluse and black widow, are poisonous. Wear gloves, longed sleeved shirts and long pants when working in debris piles, sheds, closets, and attics. Spider bites may produce redness, swelling, rash, tingling, pain, stiffness, fever, nausea, abdominal pain, sweating or chills. Apply a cold compress and get medical help.

**Ticks:** Most ticks are harmless but some carry infections and their bite can transmit bacteria that cause illnesses such as Lyme disease. In wooded or grassy areas, wear shoes, long pants tucked into socks and

long-sleeved shirts. Use insect repellents containing DEET. Once indoors, shower immediately, because ticks can remain on your skin for many hours before biting. To remove a tick gently grasp it near its head and steadily pull it out, then flush it away. If you develop a rash or become sick, seek medical help.



**Snakes:** Most snakes are not poisonous, but some, like rattlesnakes, are. Where snakes are a concern, wear thick gloves and high boots and make sure your tetanus shot is up to date. If you're bitten by a non-poisonous snake, wash the bite, cover it with an antibiotic cream, and bandage it. If you suspect the snake is poisonous, apply ice and seek immediate medical help.

Not all people react the same way to a bite or sting. Your reaction may vary by the amount of venom injected, your physiology or your immune system. If you are bitten or stung and experience health effects, get medical treatment immediately. □

### TOPIC REVIEW

Instructor \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Attended By \_\_\_\_\_

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#### Safety Recommendations

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Please forward to the person responsible for your safety program

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News about Occupational Safety and Health in Public Agencies

Issue Two, 2009

## Employer Education Series

State Fund continues to promote community educational outreach by increasing the quantity and frequency of employer seminars. These seminars are produced and sponsored by State Fund and are open to State Fund policyholders. The seminar topics cover all aspects of worker's compensation and are offered statewide.

As part of State Fund's Employer Education Series, the local State Fund Loss Control departments offer safety seminars dedicated to loss prevention. They feature safety training targeted to specific industries and safety topics of interest to California employers. Various programs in the series are developed in conjunction with State Fund insured Group Programs and external affiliates and partners. Some of these partners are occupational safety and health providers such as Cal/OSHA Consultation Service, the Department of Health Services, and the University of California.

The goal of State Fund's Employer Education Series is to present valuable information from recognized safety and health experts to enable employers to reduce the frequency and severity of workplace injuries, facilitate regulatory compliance, and increase business profits.

The program venues provide the opportunity for attendees to have their workplace safety questions immediately and personally answered by industry experts. The typically half-day seminars are usually held at regional State Fund offices. To learn what programs are scheduled in your area, visit [www.scif.com](http://www.scif.com) and click on Seminars. □

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## Reporting Work-Related Injuries

State Fund's Claims Reporting Center (1-888-222-3211) is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for policyholders to report injuries as soon as they occur. Agents will do the necessary paperwork to get the claim started and refer the injured to the designated physician or provider.

Within 8 hours of any serious illness or injury (requiring hospitalization over 24 hours, other than for medical observation or where there is permanent employee disfigurement) or death occurring in the workplace or in connection with employment, employers must report the incident to the Division of Occupational Safety and Health. □

This Public Agency Safety News is produced by the Safety and Health Services Department of State Fund to assist clients in their loss control efforts. Information or recommendations contained in this publication were obtained from sources believed to be reliable at the date of publication. Information is only advisory and does not presume to be exhaustive or inclusive of all workplace hazards or situations. Permission to reprint articles subject to approval by State Compensation Insurance Fund.

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# Safety News

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STATE COMPENSATION INSURANCE FUND

## Beware Of Stimulants

If you use energy or caffeinated drinks and supplements or prescription and recreational drugs to boost your mental or physical energy at work, you should do so with caution. Stimulants can affect your job safety.

Caffeine is the most common stimulant. In moderation, it can increase energy, but it affects people differently. If you overuse caffeine, you can feel nervous and irritable, anxious, and get an abnormal heart rhythm (arrhythmia). You may have difficulty concentrating and sleeping, leading to mistakes on the job. You may miss your body's signals that it is tired and you should slow down, leading to strains, sprains and injuries.

Because caffeine is a diuretic, it can cause frequent urination, dehydration, and heat illness, if you're exposed to hot work environments or heavy exercise. You should know your caffeine tolerance.

Energy drinks are another popular source of caffeine. Overuse of a high caffeine content energy drink can lead to dehydration, nausea, vomiting, and heart irregularities. Never mix an energy drink with alcohol; the combination can mask the effects of alcohol, causing you to over-indulge. Energy drinks may contain other additives like amino acids, carbohydrates (sugars), vitamins, and herbs that can have their own side effects.

Read product labels to get the ingredients, potential side effects, and directions on amounts you can drink in a day.

There are energy supplements available in pill or tablet form that contain caffeine, sugar, herbs and

vitamins. These are advertised to boost strength, alertness, energy, and/or weight loss but they too can have mild to serious side effects from the caffeine, individual ingredients, or combinations. Read supplement labels for ingredients, use, and dose directions.

Some prescription medications and recreational (illegal) drugs like cocaine, ecstasy, and amphetamines can cause users to feel a temporary surge of

energy, activity, and alertness. Don't take recreational drugs (or consume alcohol) before or during work hours. Overuse of any drug stimulant can lead to addiction and severe physical and mental symptoms. Because drugs alter your reaction time, ability to reason, and alertness, they can lead to serious mistakes and accidents.

Control the amounts of stimulant drinks and supplements you use. If you use prescription drugs, follow the directions and dose information. Don't drive or operate machinery if you are feeling the effects of stimulant overuse. Know the signs and symptoms of overuse in yourself and coworkers. □



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## The Expert's Corner

# Going Green With Office Lighting

In a standard office, lighting accounts for about 60% of a company's electrical costs. Despite recent efforts to make offices more energy efficient, surprisingly the majority are still overlit for computer work. According to the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), about 30 foot candles (fc) of surrounding light for monitor viewing are all that is necessary for healthy computer use. Any more than this can create glare and reflections on the monitor screen, which can result in awkward postures and symptoms like headaches, nausea and fatigue in the user. Yet the typical office ranges from 60-100 fc, far more than is recommended, which results in a correspondingly larger consumption of energy as well.

Some simple steps companies can take to both make their lighting environment healthier for employees and to reduce their energy costs:

If your company hasn't done so already, replace all fluorescent fixture ballasts with

high-frequency electronic ballasts and full-spectrum T-8 tubes. This will substantially reduce your energy costs.

Better yet, replace those ballasts with a dimmable type, so that your entire system can be lowered down to the preferred 30 fc range with ease.



Maintaining a balanced overhead lighting system is important, so simply turning off some fixtures or removing certain tubes are not good options, as these can create hot

spots or dark areas and electrical safety hazards. Some systems are wired so that one wall switch controls the center tube in a three-tube fixture. If yours is set up this way, simply turning off this center tube can effectively reduce consumption by a third and result in an overall reduction in illumination of 20-30 fc.

Another simple energy saving technique in warmer weather is to close the blinds on the south and west facing sides of your building before leaving for the weekend. This will minimize the heat gain your HVAC system must overcome when the system comes back up to speed on Monday. □

*Jeff Tiedeman, an Ergonomics Consultant with State Fund, is a Certified Safety Professional (CSP), and a Board-Certified Industrial Ergonomist (CIE). He has done extensive research on specialized topics related to ergonomics, including illumination in the workplace and seating design, and has written articles and spoken at conferences on these subjects.*

## In Defense Of Lawyer Safety

Practicing law can be more than a full time job. Legal research, writing, court appearances, client visits, and extensive driving lead to fatigue and stress; computer use, phone work, and heavy case files increase the chance of ergonomic injury risks; and the interface with clients and the public can expose lawyers to workplace violence. If you're a lawyer, acknowledge the risks and plan strategies to prevent injuries.

Short deadlines and heavy case loads can

cause excessive, prolonged stress along with physical symptoms like digestive problems, headaches, and high blood pressure. Use relaxation techniques and deep breathing to reduce stress. Avoid over scheduling and ask for help. Get enough sleep, exercise, and maintain your overall health.

Long hours at the computer can lead to repetitive motion or back and neck injuries; consider a workstation ergonomic evaluation. Use adjustable office furniture to prop-

erly fit your equipment to you. Forceful and repetitive movements can injure you, so avoid banging on your keyboard keys; type smoothly and with even pressure. Learn keyboard shortcuts to reduce typing and mousing. Take frequent mini-breaks and rotate tasks throughout the day to avoid fatigue. For frequent or lengthy phone calls use a headset; avoid cradling the phone between your neck and shoulder.

*Continued on next page*

# Allow Workers To Acclimate

Cal/OSHA studies of heat-related illnesses and deaths indicate that allowing workers to acclimate to the heat is one of the best defenses against heat-related illnesses and fatalities. The risk of dying from heat illness appears to be especially critical during the first exposure to the high temperatures and for new workers who just begin working in extreme heat as the body needs to adapt gradually to exertions in the heat and humidity. It's imperative to monitor workers at all times during hot weather and allow those who are new to working in hot weather to gradually adapt to the daily routine.

Letting workers adjust to changes in weather by gradually increasing their heat exposure and physical activity likely reduces the risk of heat-related issues. According to Cal/OSHA heat illness prevention data, most people adjust to the weather or acclimate within four-to-14 days of regular work levels.

Raising awareness is also an important key in preventing heat illness. California Heat Illness Prevention Standards require mandatory training for employees and supervisors. Information on acclimatization, encouraging employees to

continuously drink water throughout the day, and taking frequent cool-down breaks or preventative recovery periods in the shade, among other actions are included in the mandatory training.

In addition to the requirements outlined in the heat illness prevention regulations (section 3395 of Title 8), employers may consider starting the work day early and pacing work activities for their workers. Other prevention techniques include increasing the number of water and rest breaks or preventative recovery periods on hot days and encouraging the use of a "buddy system" to monitor employees in the field.

Employees who work indoors should take the same precautions as those who work outdoors in extreme heat, and follow similar measures under (section 3203 of Title 8) their employers' Injury and Illness Prevention Program.

Cal/OSHA studies show effective reduction of heat illness depends on written procedures, access to water, access to cooler areas, acclimatization and weather monitoring, emergency response and employee and supervisor training. □

# June is National Safety Month

Accidents and resulting injuries take their toll not only with the tragic price of human suffering but also with the monumental costs of economic capital in lost wages, productivity or property, and in increased medical, administrative, and insurance expenses. In an effort to raise awareness about how to stay healthy and safe both on- and off-the-job, the National Safety Council (NSC) has designated June as National Safety Month.

Each of the four weeks in June focuses on a specific safety topic, which includes some of our nation's most pressing safety risks, according to research.

The following link to NSC's website <http://www.nsc.org/NSM/> provides detailed information on each week's activities, along with posters and tip sheets for employers, designed to help develop employee safety recognition.

- Week 1 – Teen Driving
- Week 2 – Falls (in the workplace and at home)
- Week 3 – Overexertion (in the workplace and at home)
- Week 4 – Distracted Driving (primarily from cell phone talking and texting)

We hope employers will join with the National Safety Council for this National Safety Month and do their part to reduce the number of accidental injuries and deaths not only for the month of June but for all year...every year. □

## Continued from previous page

Store often-used files on shelves at waist level to avoid reaching and bending. Lift heavy case files and documents using proper lifting techniques. Keep your head facing forward and lift with your legs, not your back. Hold loads close

to your body. Break down awkward, heavy files into smaller folders. Use a wheeled, long-handled briefcase to transport supplies and working documents; use a cart for heavy loads.

Interface with the public and clients requires workplace security and personal safety. Establish procedures for home, office, court, and detention facility



visits with clients. Flag case files of clients with a non-compliant or violent history. Get training on calming an agitated client. Control access to the inner office and escort visitors. Consider safety features like alarms and barriers at reception counters. Keep emergency contact numbers by every phone and programmed into cell phones.

Busy, stressed people do too many tasks while they drive. Eating, telephoning, texting, reading, and grooming take your attention off the road. While driving, keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes and mind on the road. If you MUST use the phone in the car, use a hands-free model and keep the calls short. □

