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News about Occupational Safety and Health in Trades & Services

Issue Three, 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 and click on Seminars. □

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 Trades & Services 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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REMEMBER TO RECYCLE
THIS NEWSLETTER



Safety News

ISSUE THREE,
2009

S T A T E C O M P E N S A T I O N I N S U R A N C E F U N D

Motivating Safety Awareness

Want to increase your company's safety effectiveness? Here are some simple things you can do to keep safety awareness on the minds of your workers.

safe work practices are followed, let them know you are aware and pleased. Praise correct procedures and make workers aware of areas that need improvement.

Provide safety training and instill hazard awareness early. Emphasize accident prevention during any job training. Explain rules and regulations thoroughly.

Rules are less likely to be broken or ignored when workers understand them and why they have been estab-

lished. Be specific about working safely and enforce safety rules uniformly. You can't let one worker break the rules and then expect others to follow them.

Communicate effectively and frequently. Inform workers about what they need to know to perform their jobs safely. Be positive and encourage two-way conversations. Listen to worker concerns and suggestions. Few people like to be told dogmatically what they should or should not do, so try to avoid lecturing or preaching. If workers have ideas that will improve safety performance, listen to them. If an idea is practical put it into effect and make certain the worker gets the credit for it.

Most employees want recognition, so be a credit giver. Observe how workers do their job. When



Be a hazard detector. It's human for workers who have done a job over and over to take work operations for granted. However, a relaxed attitude can lead to accidents. Watch for changing worker behavior. If you notice that a usually reliable worker has become inattentive or

preoccupied, it's a danger signal. When a worker's mind is not on the job, the stage is set for an accident. Train workers to always be safety conscious, so that they are continuously aware of injury hazards to themselves or their co-workers.

Analyze jobs from a safety viewpoint. Know each job in your operation so you can spot potential hazards. If a different work practice will eliminate a hazard, introduce it. Explain why, from a safety viewpoint, certain work practices must be followed, without exception. And finally, be aware of the physical or emotional condition of your workers to determine if they are able to do their jobs safely. You may want to reassign workers to activities they can perform without jeopardizing their safety or the safety of others. □

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The Expert's Corner

Protecting Workers From Noise-Induced Hearing Loss

Being in compliance with the Cal/OSHA (or Federal OSHA) noise regulations does not always prevent work-related hearing loss or a workers' compensation claim. That's because research indicates that the current regulations simply aren't protective enough.

Cal/OSHA's noise regulations have a permissible noise exposure level (PEL) of 90 dBA (decibels, A-weighted) for 8 hours. The regulations also set an "action level" of 85 dBA. When employees are exposed above this action level, the employer must implement a hearing conservation program that includes annual hearing tests to determine if employees have experienced a hearing loss.

There are two deficiencies with the current regulations that put employees at risk. First, the Cal/OSHA PEL and action level are not protective enough. Secondly, some industries (most notably construction and agriculture) are exempt from having a hearing conservation program. Without annual hearing tests, a worker may not notice (or bring to the attention of the employer) a hearing loss



until it becomes debilitating. Once hearing is lost, the damage is permanent.

There are guidelines for employers that protect employees from the damaging effects of occupational noise. One of these is the threshold limit value (TLV) set by the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH). Another is the recommended exposure limit (REL) set by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Both guidelines recommend an exposure limit of 85 dBA for an 8-hour workday.

Not only do ACGIH and NIOSH guidelines

lower the exposure limit to 85 dBA, they also lower what is called the "exchange rate" from 5 dBA to 3 dBA. When the sound level increases by the decibel value of the exchange rate, the allowed duration is halved. In other words, Cal/OSHA allows an employee to be exposed to 90 dBA for 8-hours, 100 dBA for 4-hours, etc., while ACGIH and NIOSH recommendations allow 85 dBA for 8-hours, 88 dBA for 4-hours, etc. That's quite a difference between what's allowable under the law and what's considered protective. In addition, NIOSH and ACGIH recommendations for annual hearing tests do not exempt any industries.

If you want to save workers from the debilitating effects of hearing loss, and prevent costly workers' compensation claims, protect your employees by following the ACGIH or NIOSH guidelines. □

Mary Jo Jensen CIH, CSP, is a Certified Industrial Hygienist assigned to State Fund's Sacramento and Redding Districts.

How Safe Is Your Office?

Many workers think that the office environment is the safest workplace. But, a safe office workplace requires hazard control, good housekeeping, and safe work practices.

Arrange your office to allow clear walkways and aisles throughout the rooms and near exits. Attach tall and heavy office furniture to the wall to avoid tipovers in an earthquake. Close file cabinet drawers, file doors, and pull-out work tables when not in use. To

avoid jamming your fingers or hands, make sure that cabinet and desk drawers do not open into walls or other furniture. Close drawers and doors with the flat of your hand.

Prevent falls in the office by keeping walkways and floors clear of trash, cords, cables, and other items. Clean up work areas after each project and periodically throughout the day. Clean up liquid spills immediately and mark the hazard area with a "wet floor" sign until the floor dries. Walk slowly, and be

aware of your surroundings. Use handrails when going up and down stairs. Wear proper footwear at the office; a slip-resistant sole and a back strap are safest.

Store supplies and materials properly to maintain a safe workplace. Arrange your storage so that the heavier items are stored on lower shelves and keep lighter-weight items on upper shelves. Keep a sturdy step

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Look Sharp – Prevent Injuries

Sharp instruments and tools are essential to many work environments, but sharp or pointed objects – if handled improperly – can cause painful injuries that can lead to serious infection or disease. Before you use a sharp tool or instrument, make sure you've been properly trained in its safe use and then follow all recommended handling procedures to prevent an injury to yourself or to others.

Use sharp items as they were designed and wear protective gloves when recommended. Sharpen cutting tools regularly; dull blades require more force and may be more likely to slip and cause an injury.

Let falling sharps fall. Don't grab for falling cutting tools, sharp instruments or glassware. It's better to clean up a mess or

replace the item rather than risk an injury. Follow cleanup precautions at all times. Dispose of defective sharps and chipped or cracked glassware properly. Wear gloves; use a damp towel to pick up broken glass.

Never "bear hug" a bag or blindly reach into drawers or into wastebaskets or disposal containers



with bare hands. Check disposal bags before lifting to see if they are overloaded or likely to break, spilling broken glass or other sharps. Lift plastic bags from their tie-off point and paper bags by their edges whenever possible and hold bags away from the body.

When not in use, store sharp tools and instruments where they belong and where they can be reached easily but pose no threat of injury. Always check to see that guards are in place on machinery with cutting blades. After use, make sure that movable blades are covered or retracted, that needles are capped, and that scissors are closed.

Improper handling of sharp objects is one of the leading causes of injuries from them.

Don't rush or take shortcuts when handling sharp tools or instruments. Don't carry sharp items loose in your pocket. Protect yourself and others by handling sharps safely. The right combination of attitude and action can prevent most injuries from sharp instruments and tools. □

October is National Ergonomics Month

October has been designated National Ergonomics Month (NEM) by the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (HFES) with the goal of raising awareness about the principles and benefits of applied ergonomics. Simply put, ergonomics is the science of making tools, tasks, products, environments, and systems safer and more comfortable for human use. The October campaign strives to educate the public about how to make the changes that can improve their safety, performance, and comfort.

State Fund encourages its insureds to participate in NEM. To get you started, we have developed a comprehensive ergonomics educational CD-ROM, "Ergonomics: How May We Help You?" available free of charge to State Fund policyholders. The CD has everything you need to get your ergonomics program started and maintained:

- General information
- Tools to identify risk factors
- Training material
- Steps to develop a written program
- Cost benefits of an ergonomics program
- Effective medical management

To get your copy of the CD and find out what other safety information is available to you (such as ErgoMatters® and bilingual Safety Meeting Topics) visit www.scif.com or contact the Loss Control Department of your local State Fund office. □

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stool in storage areas to avoid reaching. Use good body mechanics when lifting and moving items. Request an ergonomic evaluation from your supervisor if you feel discomfort while at your desk or performing other tasks at work.

Use only approved electrical equipment in the office. Examine electric cords and plugs for breaks, tears, and frayed wires before use. Do not use extension cords as a permanent source of electrical power; install an extra electric outlet if necessary. Do not create chains of extension cords and surge protectors ("daisy-chains")

because they can overload your electrical outlets and create fire hazards.

Periodic workplace safety inspections can keep your office safe. Report hazards to your supervisor quickly and make sure that they get corrected as soon as possible. Be prepared for an emergency in your building. Know your building emergency procedures, evacuation routes, and assembly area. Know how to use a fire extinguisher and when it is safe to do so. Keep exits and aisle walkways clear to allow a quick evacuation. □

