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Loss Control Services

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News about Occupational Safety and Health in Trades & Services

Issue Four, 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 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 FOUR,  
2009

STATE COMPENSATION INSURANCE FUND

## Flu Season Is Nothing To Sneeze At

**T**he flu season is here and State Fund advises employers to educate all employees about flu facts, symptoms, and preventative measures and to prepare their business operations should a pandemic outbreak significantly reduce their workforce or disrupt their business operation.

Generally speaking, the “flu” is a respiratory disease caused by an influenza (flu) virus. Transmission of the virus from person-to-person usually occurs when infected people cough or sneeze the virus germs into the air or onto an object. Others may then become infected by breathing in the airborne virus germs or by touching the virus-contaminated object then touching their mouth or nose through which the virus enters their body.

Symptoms of most flu strains include a fever (often high), cough, body aches, headaches, fatigue and runny or stuffy nose. Vomiting and diarrhea may also occur. If workers suspect they may have been exposed to or contracted the flu, they should see their doctor for advice and treatment.

The CDC recommends the following flu prevention measures: avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth; wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze (alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective); cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and then throw the tissue away; and if you get sick, stay home and limit contact with others.

To prepare for a possible pandemic flu outbreak in the workplace, employers should develop con-

tingency plans for each business location. Identify essential employees and critical raw materials suppliers, sub-contractors, transporters, customers, and other logistics that keep their business functioning. Train employees on the contingency plan and consider cross-training workers as backup for necessary job activities. Employers may also wish to consider ways to decentralize the workforce with satellite worksites and at-home computer and communication links to the worksite to allow flexibility to employees that can work.



Visit State Fund’s website at [www.scif.com](http://www.scif.com) to access the Loss Control Bulletin, “Preparing for a Pandemic Flu” The bulletin recommends that businesses circulate a company hygiene policy; establish policies for exposed or infected employees; and create an infection control response and notification plan. From the website you can also download copies of precautionary safety sheets in English and Spanish (Standard Precautions, Airborne Precautions, Contact Precautions, and Droplet Precautions). To learn more about the flu or pandemic flu prevention, visit [www.cdc.gov/flu/](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/) □

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## The Expert's Corner

# Prevent Injury From Backpacks, Purses, Laptops, And Wallets

People are used to hearing about ergonomics at work, but rarely think about the everyday items used to carry “stuff” that may contribute to physical discomfort and injury. The information below focuses on the ergonomics of what we use to carry our smart phones, computers, and other personal items.

Backpacks are used by people of all ages; unfortunately, they are often overloaded and packed incorrectly. This has contributed to an increase in reported back, shoulder, and neck pain.

- Wear both straps over both shoulders with the backpack over the mid-back muscles.
- Avoid the shoulder straps from being too loose or too tight.
- Keep the weight of the backpack within 10-15% of the user's bodyweight. Carry only what is needed and organize the contents by placing the heavier items closest to the back.

Purses have grown in size and weight and, as the saying goes, “the bigger the bag, the



more stuff will fill it”. Single-strap purses cause uneven loading of the back muscles and restrict blood flow at the shoulder.

- Keep purses as light as possible by carrying only what is essential.
- Avoid thin straps, long straps, and chain handles.
- Regularly switch shoulders when carrying.

Laptop bags are typically single-strap models, carried over one shoulder. The weight of the laptop and other bag contents can place

considerable strain on the shoulder muscles, restrict blood flow, and pinch nerves.

- Consider using a bag with wheels or a two-strap backpack.
- Alternate carrying the bag by switching sides and holding it down close.
- Avoid using a sling-style messenger bag.

Wallets may be smaller, but they can contribute to extreme pain in the low back. Sitting on a wallet in the back pocket can cause damage to key nerves in the back. Always remove the wallet from the back pocket when sitting and/or driving. Consider a thinner, smaller style wallet and carry only what is necessary. □

*Kristy Schultz, MS, CIE, is a Certified Industrial Ergonomist with State Fund and is based in Northern California.*

## Cruising For A Bruising?

Controlling the speed of your car with your fingertips on cruise control lets you take your foot off the accelerator and rest. It can be a good way to prevent driver fatigue, speeding, and help with fuel economy during long trips on flat, straight roads and highways. However, the cruise control feature can cause accidents if you use it improperly or in hazardous road conditions such as city streets, heavy traffic, hills, winding roads, and wet, slippery roads.

Set the cruise control speed at a legal, safe speed for the road and the current driving conditions. Using cruise control in traffic and on city streets with lights and stop signs can be tedious, frustrating, and unsafe. In these situations, you need to reset your cruise control each time you brake and it is unlikely you would be driving at the minimum speeds needed for cruise control.

Cruise control on hills and winding roads can be hazardous. On hills, it is best to manually

control your speed using the accelerator and brake. Cruise control may not accelerate your vehicle properly up a hill, making you a slow-moving hazard. A steep downhill grade can cause your vehicle to speed up faster than the cruise control setting and safe road speeds. Watch your speedometer and manually accelerate and brake as needed. On twisting and winding roads, brake and accelerate into and

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# Help Workers Manage Stress

In today's world, we deal with a multitude of stressors...the economy, uncontrollable world events, our work, and personal or financial pressures, etc. When the stress-defense response is continually activated without recovery downtime, it could have negative consequences on an individual or in the workplace.

Feelings of stress can lower morale, reduce productivity, and increase accidents, injuries, health problems, or violent outbursts - all of which can affect the safe and efficient operation of the workplace.

Individuals can't control all the stress-producing elements in their lives but they can learn to balance those stresses and control how they respond to them.

Make sure stress awareness is part of your employee-training program. Acknowledge that it exists in everyone's life and that individuals vary in their stress thresholds and recovery rates. Let employees know that although some stressors can be controlled and managed, some stressors cannot be changed. But, also let them know what resources are available to them should their stress become a condition they're unable to manage on their own.

Keep communication lines open by talking to



employees. Periodic staff meetings may provide a forum where employees can air their frustrations or share their ideas and perhaps develop stress reduction solutions. If changes in employee attitudes are observed, talk about what's going on. Keep employees informed of job changes and allow

them to participate in decision making, where possible. Make sure your compliments on work practices outnumber your criticisms. It helps if the employee is a good match for the job. Encourage employees to adopt a healthy personal lifestyle including practicing relaxation techniques, establishing good eating habits, monitoring alcohol or drug consumption, exercising, and developing a personal support network.

Stress management is about balance. Balance stress with relaxation, compliments with criticisms, work with play, problems with rewards, and positives with negatives. Negative workplace stress takes a toll on employees and employers but constructively managing it can have significant payoffs to employee productivity and business profitability! □

# Practice Good Housekeeping

A planned and enforced housekeeping program is an important part of any safety program that can produce immediate and long-range positive results. A clean and orderly workplace can prevent slips, trips, or falls and reduce the chance of caught- and struck-by injuries. Practicing good housekeeping can also lower operating costs and increase worker production.

When a work area is clean and orderly, workers can do their jobs more efficiently, without unnecessary delays. And, production runs smoothly when workers can quickly find and locate tools, parts, and materials. Keeping floor space clear and unobstructed allows workers freedom of movement, smoother and faster traffic flow, and easy access to machinery and equipment.

Another benefit to good housekeeping is the reduction of fire hazards. Poor housekeeping can cause fires, help spread them, impede the effort to put them out or prevent the safe exit from a fire. Good housekeeping also contributes to higher employee morale.

A clean and orderly workplace lessens frustration, increases comfort, makes work more enjoyable, and improves employee attitudes. But, for a good housekeeping program to be effective, management must be committed to the program, communicate their commitment to workers, and consistently enforce the program's practices. □

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out of the turns. With cruise control on, you could approach a turn at an unsafe speed and lose control.

Don't use your cruise control when the road is wet and slippery due to heavy rain, hail, snow, ice, or other conditions. If your wheels begin to skid and you don't step on the brake to stop, the continued acceleration can cause you to overdrive the road conditions and lose wheel traction and control of the vehicle. If you do step on the brake to stop,

slow, or even turn off the cruise control, the change in tire speed can also cause the wheels to slip, lose traction and skid out of control. If there is heavy rainfall, water puddles, and a slippery road surface, hydroplaning and serious accidents can occur.

Fatigue and a false sense of security can lead to a lack of attention and an accident. Keep your brain engaged in your driving; scan the road ahead for traffic, obstacles, and changing road conditions. □

