

Manager/Supervisor Risk Management

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A twice weekly e-mail training for YCPARMIA members

TOPIC: SAFETY –MATCHING PREVENTION TO INJURIES - CONTINUED

Possibly the most common type of injuries suffered by YCPARMIA workers are caused by lifting or handling an object. The resulting injuries can be as simple as a strain, to something as serious as a disc injury. Recoveries can be slow, and often involve temporary restrictions that keep the injured worker from being fully productive. Equally important, these are the types of injuries where we see a lot of re-injuries or flare-ups.

There are probably three principle ways that a supervisor can reduce the exposure to lifting injuries:

- Teach the employees how to safely lift objects;
- Analyze and modify work processes to minimize lifting exposures;
- Protect employees from themselves.

It might seem that employees don't need training as they should instinctively know how to lift, but YCPARMIA's injury history argues otherwise. Most people have heard the adage, "lift with your legs, not your back," but few have actually been trained how (without injuring a knee). YCPARMIA offers training in how to safely lift, and has brought a physical therapist in to provide additional training for interested member departments.

Many of our work processes are based on habit rather than safety. Employees are pushing their limit because no one, including the employee, has ever stopped to think if there is a better way to do a task. Items, from heavy equipment to large files, are being moved on a regular basis with no apparent problem, until something goes wrong. At that point, in hindsight, someone realizes that it would have been a good idea to modify the process so that the involved employee had a greater margin of safety. Having the impacted employees share their collective experiences and concerns, and then addressing them, is a classic loss prevention approach.

The third element, and in some ways the most difficult, is for a supervisor to actively protect their people from their own actions. If you read the accident investigation reports following lifting injuries, the suggested solution to avoid future injuries commonly calls for the employee to exercise better judgment. This is one of those areas where expediency and getting the job done, often has a higher priority than doing it safely. Forcing an employee to slow down, to ask for help from other employees, or to admit that they are not able to comfortably lift something is probably not a common practice in many departments. A supervisor needs to appreciate the requirements of different job functions, and know the physical limitations of the employees doing them. If they suspect that a specific employee is not up to a lifting task due to a previous injury or poor physical conditioning, they need to intervene.

Lifting injuries linger, and often reappear; preventing them requires a conscious ongoing effort.

Next Topic: Safety – Matching Prevention to Injuries -training