

Workplace Overexertion Injuries

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the private industry sector, transportation and warehousing had the highest incidence rates for overexertion injuries. Other industries with above average incidence rates include educational and health services, wholesale trade, retail trade and construction.

Overexertion injuries are non-impact injuries that result from excessive physical effort. They can be caused by lifting, pulling, pushing, turning, welding, holding, or carrying objects or people, and do not include injuries caused by repetitive motion or vibration. Worker overexertion incidence rates were highest among 35 to 54 year-olds, and higher for males than females. Specific occupations with the highest rates included emergency medical technicians and paramedics and nursing aides, orderlies and attendants.

Lifting accounted for more than half of the overexertion injuries. Holding, carrying, turning and wielding, and pulling and pushing each accounted for an additional 17 percent. About three-quarters of the injuries involved sprains or strains. The back was the most commonly injured part of the body, accounting for 50 percent of the injuries. The shoulder, and other trunk and upper extremities also were frequently injured due to overexertion.

Costs Associated With Overexertion

According to the latest 2009 Workplace Safety Index, costs associated with overexertion injuries increased more than 2 percent from 2006 to 2007, to a total of \$12.7 billion. This resulted in the first place ranking of overexertion injuries with the highest costs associated with any single injury type. Although its overall share

of total cost declined slightly over this period, the costs for overexertion injuries still account for 24 percent of the total.

Ergonomics, A Possible Solution

Ergonomics seeks to fit the job to the worker to prevent the development of occupational injuries or illnesses and to reduce the potential for fatigue, error or unsafe practices.

The first steps toward implementing a successful ergonomics program:

1. Gain top management commitment and employee involvement
2. Identify problem work environments and processes, set priorities and define program needs
3. Develop an action plan to improve the work situations

What This Means For Counties

Excessive physical effort affects people differently. For some, it may cause little or no discomfort, but for others it can be debilitating. These incidents can occur acutely from one event or be a chronic problem that develops over time. To prevent the development of occupational injuries or illnesses and to reduce the potential for fatigue, error or unsafe practices, we recommend that you have your workplace safety assessment done by your CTSI Loss Prevention Representative. There are a series of questions used in this assessment.

For more information, contact your CTSI Loss Prevention Representative at 303-861-0507.