

Interactive guidelines can reduce recurrent back injuries

The Ohio State Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) and Ohio State University's (OSU) Biodynamics Laboratory have teamed up to create a set of lifting guidelines designed to reduce the frequency of recurrent occupational back injuries.

Researchers speculate that employees frequently re-injure their backs because they do not use adequate work restrictions before they fully recover. When a back injury is aggravated, it can lead to permanent damage.

The lifting guidelines were developed to get employees back to work safely and avoid permanent damage to their backs, to aid in creating realistic transitional work programs for employees with low-back disorders, and to provide guidance on the design of lifting tasks to reduce the frequency and severity of initial and recurring back claims.

The guidelines were designed to be used by employers, medical professionals and employees transitioning back to work after a back injury. The guidelines can help return an injured worker to the job as soon as possible while minimizing the risk of aggravating an existing low-back disorder.

The guidelines are available online at: www.ohiobwc.com/employers/programs/safety/Ergoliftguide.asp

The online interactive lifting guideline tool allows the user to enter criteria for a lifting task such as the initial height of object and the degree of twisting required. After analyzing the criteria, the tool determines the level of risk (low, medium or high) for the lifting task.

Tips for reducing back injuries at work

The Ohio State Bureau of Workers' Compensation website offers the following tips to reduce back injuries at work:

Eliminate unnecessary lifting. Whenever possible, eliminate manual materials handling by combining operations or shortening the distances that material must be moved. Look at material flow throughout the facility, and eliminate any unnecessary lifts.

Automate or mechanize lifting. Consider automating the lifting task or using a mechanical lifting device. Devices such as hoists, cranes and manipulators can eliminate the forces on the spine associated with manual materials handling and therefore, reduce the likelihood of back injuries.

Modify the job to fit within worker capabilities. Design the job to reduce the stress on the body as much as possible. Some possible job modifications are:

- Lift loads as close to the body as possible
- Place the load as close to the waist height as possible
- Reduce the need to twist the trunk by re-orienting the lifting origins and destinations
- Reduce the weight of the load being lifted so that the weights are within the recommended lifting guidelines

For more information, contact your CTSI loss prevention representative at 303.861.0507.

Sources: The Ohio Bureau of Worker's Compensation and the Institute for Ergonomics, The Ohio State University

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