

Safety Topics

Volume 02, Issue 9 & 10

Sept/October 2002

Special points of interest:

Sorry I missed last month. Did you miss me? I don't know where the time goes. It just seems to disappear!

This month I visit back injuries again. Most of you have jobs that require you to do physical activity on an irregular schedule. Please think about taking care of your back!

October is National Fire Safety Month—Place a special emphasis on fire safety at home as well as at work!



Sprains and Strains Lead Again

We have just ended the Policy Year for our business insurance, so I look at what has happened and compare that with what happened in previous years. Unfortunately, this year looks an awful lot like past years. And, to add insult to injury (so to speak) premiums for our insurance coverage for the coming year have gone up significantly.

A quick look at what type of injuries that occurred in the past year shows that strains and sprains continue to be the most frequent injury. That is consistent with our previous experience. You know that ever since mankind stood up and walked erect he has suffered back pain. Eighty percent of people in the United States will suffer some sort of back injury that will require medical attention during their working life (I suspect that the other 20% never do anything). How many of these injuries could be avoided by improved lifting techniques, I don't know for sure. But I know from my own experience that thinking about what I am doing and a little pre-planning works to avoid some potential back and shoulder muscle sprains and strains.

Back injuries alone cost U. S. citizens upward to \$5 billion annually. Back surgery is successful maybe 10% of the time. Once a back has been injured, re-injury is more likely. Back injuries are painful and take a long time to heal. Doesn't it make sense to avoid the injury, if at all possible?

There are whole ranges of circumstances that contribute to the potential to injure your back. Today's population tends to be overweight and gets less than enough physical activity. Many jobs require long stretches of sitting while driving where poor posture can strain the back. Not warming up and stretching prior to doing the job. "It can't happen to me" attitudes or simply not thinking about what is required to make a "safe" lift. Most of our jobs require some lifting and carrying and unless people think about back safety every time they lift or pull

or push, chances are they will do it improperly.

We tend to do things the "easy" way or the "way it has always been done". Lifting improperly is easier than thinking about using your legs and keeping the load close to your body. I think most people know how to lift properly or at least have had proper lifting techniques presented to them. They just don't take the time to think about it.

Please think about your job and practice these suggestions for proper lifting:

- Lift with your legs.** The strongest muscles in the body are your thigh muscles and the weakest are the low back muscle.
- Keep loads close to your body while lifting and carrying.**
- Get help with heavy loads.**
- Never lift and twist.**
- Try stretching your muscles prior to lifting or pulling.** Who cares what other people think if you can avoid the pain of a sprain and strain.
- Exercise regularly.** Walking, sit-ups, and stretching exercises strengthen stomach muscle which aid the back's work and reduces the overhang in the front.
- Think.** Lifting, stacking, pulling, and pushing are a thinking person's job. Do some pre-planning before a lifting task. Get creative about better ways of doing things. Use mechanical equipment when possible. If you have ideas about how to reduce sprain and strain injuries let your supervisor know or talk to Terry or me.

Another cause for concern is the number of lacerations that have occurred in the last year. It appears that we are sticking our hands where they should not be. I need to do a little more investigation in to this relatively new development. That will be a topic for another *Safety Topics*.

October is National Fire Safety Month—check the batteries in your smoke detector!

Safety Topics - Sprains & Strains Lead The Way Again!

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These Safety Topics are an attempt at continuing education. Please read the information and let me know if you have an idea for future Topics. Your input is appreciated!

Plant Location: _____

Supervisor/Foreman/Plant Manager Signature:

Names of those who reviewed this information:

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