

The Safety & Health Advisor

Fall 2011



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Slip, Trip and Fall Prevention for Healthcare Workers

Slips, trips, and falls (STF) are among the leading causes of injury in health care work environments. The costs of these injuries are substantial and have long-term financial and operational impacts.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the incidence rate of lost-workday injuries from same-level STF at hospitals was 38.2 per 10,000 employees. That figure is 90% higher than the average rate for all other private industries combined. Additionally, slips, trips and falls make up 25% of lost-workday injuries in hospitals. They rank second in frequency behind overexertion (38%) and ahead of contact injuries (14%).

What can we do?

The starting point for any STF prevention program is a positive attitude that STF incidents can be prevented. The mentality that slips and falls just happened is simply false. The truth is there are many initiatives a company can take to help prevent these injuries.

Begin with implementing a comprehensive STF prevention program. Research conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has shown that implementing a STF prevention program in hospitals can lead to significant declines in STF. Researchers worked with hospital staff at three acute-care hospitals to design, implement, and evaluate a STF prevention program over a 10-year period from 1996 through 2005. The hospitals total STF workers' compensation claims declined 59% -- saving thousands of dollars!

Specifically:

1) Establish management commitment to the reduction of slip and fall hazards. Management commitment is the foundation of any safety plan. It will promote a safety culture to control employee falls. This commitment can be communicated to employees through a policy statement or written procedures and by funding appropriate STF interventions.

2) Review loss history to identify STF trends your healthcare facility. A loss analysis of previous workers compensation claims, as well as any reported near misses, can identify contributing factors to address first. This loss analysis can also pinpoint common factors, such as tasks, day, time, weather location, department, type of floor, or type of employee. A useful tool is a diagram of the facility to mark the location of falls to illustrate the problem areas.

3) Inspect floor surfaces on a regular basis. Management and other designated employees should be responsible for conducting regular inspections of walking surfaces to detect any hazards, as well as ensure appropriate corrective action is taken. Hazards should be photographed, described, and kept on file so that changes can be made and documented.

4) Perform consistent employee training and enforce use of proper control measures. Employees should be trained on how to recognize STF hazards and be involved in the development and implementation of prevention strategies. Training should begin at new employee safety orientation reviewing STF prevention ideas and their specific responsibility to help prevent STF. Continuous safety training on fall prevention should be provided to employees through regular safety meetings.

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5) Establish employee accountability by developing written housekeeping procedures that require all employees (including direct patient care staff such as nurses) to immediately report spills/snow/ice etc. to initiate a prompt response by the housekeeping or facilities departments. Management should encourage a "see it, fix it" culture with employees.

6) Define acceptable slip resistant footwear for employees. Slip resistant footwear is a good control measure to maximize traction, particularly for wet and greasy floors. Tread design and tread material are (2) two major components to consider when selecting a brand of slip resistant shoe. There are guidelines from the Shoe and Allied Trade Research Association (SATRA), as well as American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) for selection of these shoes.

7) Consider a mandatory slip resistant shoe program. Several slip resistant shoe companies provide payroll deduction plans to spread the payment of the shoes for employees. Some employers reimburse employees for the purchase of the shoes. Feel free to contact your Consultant if you would like more information on companies that provide slip resistant shoes.

Other steps include, conducting general awareness campaigns (i.e., booths, posters, emails, paycheck inserts, and incentives) educating employees about the risk of STF at work and what they can do to prevent injuries. Also, remember to reinforce the use of prevention equipment such as the use of handrails and appropriate footwear with staff (as noted above).

Lastly, review NIOSH's recently issued workbook Slip, Trip and Fall Prevention for Healthcare Workers. It can be downloaded at:

www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2011-123/

This workbook is intended to help the healthcare community prevent "slips, trips, and falls" among its workers. The tools section of the workbook provides resources for assessing risks, implementing a STF prevention program for your facility along with STF checklists.

Specific to healthcare facilities, it also identifies the top ten sources of STF injuries and lists other recommendations to reduce or eliminate these most common STF hazards.

OSHA'S 2011 Site-Specific Targeting Plan

On September 9, 2011 OSHA announced its 2011 Site-Specific Targeting (SST) plan, the Agency's annual inspection program for general industry establishments with high numbers of injuries and illnesses.

The SST program is OSHA's main programmed inspection plan for non-construction workplaces that have 20 or more workers.

Two changes have been made to this year's SST program. In 2010, only those establishments in the selected industries with 40 or more employees were subject to inspections under the SST plan; this year, that number has been reduced to 20 or more. An evaluation study measuring the program's impact on future compliance with OSHA standards has also been introduced for the 2011 program.

The 2011 SST Plan is published on OSHA's web site at:

http://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/Directive_pdf/CP_L_02-11-03.pdf

Workplace Violence Prevention

During Atlantic Charter's safety seminar on June 8th for its clients with distribution operations, Neal Freedman, Safety and Health Manager, spoke about workplace violence prevention (WVP). Part of the impetus for presenting this topic to this group was a fatal homicide incident that occurred at a beer distributor in Connecticut in the fall of 2010.

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According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, of the 421 fatal workplace injuries reported in 2008, 24% occurred in retail, 17% in leisure and hospitality, 14% in government, and 11% in transportation/warehousing.

Even though a lower percentage occurred in manufacturing and construction, the fact remains that no industry/workplace is immune from this type of incident especially in light of the pressures of today's world, i.e. recession, high unemployment, etc.

On September 8, 2011, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued a directive on Enforcement Procedures for Investigating or Inspecting Incidents of Workplace Violence.

http://osha.gov/OshDoc/Directive_pdf/CPL_02-01-052.pdf

The directive establishes uniform procedures for OSHA field staff for responding to incidents and complaints of workplace violence and conducting inspections in industries considered vulnerable to workplace violence, such as healthcare and social service settings, and late-night retail establishments.

Atlantic Charter is giving consideration to holding another WVP seminar, one that would be open to all of its industries. Atlantic Charter's Safety and Health Consultants can assist you with establishing a WVP program. Please let your Consultant know of your interest in a dedicated seminar on WVP and/or assistance with program development.

Preventing Falls from Trucks and Cabs

According to Bureau of Labor Statistics (1997), slips and falls are the leading cause of lost workdays to trucking and courier companies (almost 25% of reported cases). In order to reduce the risk for injuries, it is important to train drivers in the technique known as the "Three Point System". This concept refers to the technique of keeping two hands and one foot, or both feet and one hand, always in contact with the vehicle while exiting. The driver should always be

facing the vehicle and never be holding anything in their hands (e.g., papers, coffee cup, etc.)

It is also important to encourage drivers to report any customer delivery site fall hazard they see so the matter can be addressed with the building owner.

Drivers should also be checking the condition of the steps and handholds on their vehicles as part of their daily pre-trip inspection.

In order to improve driver awareness of the dangers of jumping or improperly climbing down from trucks and cabs, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) funded a project with the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries to create a free downloadable interactive software program. The program illustrates several different techniques (both good and bad) for exiting from a commercial tractor cab and the rear of a conventional box trailer. The program calculates the estimated impact force to the driver based on the technique of exit they use and their weight.



A link to this free downloadable software can be found at:

<http://www.KeepTruckingSafe.org/game.html>

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Warehouse Ergonomics

During Atlantic Charter's recent distribution safety seminar, Margie Lobaton, Senior Safety and Health Consultant spoke about warehouse ergonomics. She acknowledged that warehouse safety can be a challenge due to the fast paced environment and the need to manually lift products within a warehouse.

Also, the very nature of most warehouse layouts – vertically stacked shelves, means only a small portion of products are accessible within a safe range of motion. The safe range of motion is typically defined as the area between a person's shoulders and knees. Carrying and lifting objects at this height, close to the body, is the best way to spread a load over the strongest part of the musculoskeletal system and avoid injury. Reaching up or out of this zone to access boxes on a high shelf-, or deep in the rack, or stooping down to pick objects up off of the floor puts a significant amount of stress on the upper extremities and lower back.

Despite these challenges, warehouse safety should be at the forefront of everyone's mind. Frequency and the costs associated with overexertion claims are overwhelming. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistic (BLS), overexertion – injuries from excessive lifting, pushing, pulling, holding, carrying and throwing was the #1 cause of disabling injuries in 2008 accounting for \$13.40 billion dollars in costs!

To help reduce these costs, organizations can directly benefit from implementing the following ergonomic principles:

- Organize the work to eliminate manual carrying and lifting when possible. Use powered handling systems such as conveyors, cranes, hoists, lift trucks, and vacuum lifts whenever possible.
- Raise the height of pallets by stacking empty pallets beneath active ones to elevate the load to a comfortable lifting zone.
- Raise the bottom level of racking systems so that loads are at heights where torso bending is not necessary.

This method will allow workers to rack pallets normally by lift truck, and reduce the need for employees to bend over to access the loaded product.

- Store items higher on your racking systems—out of hand's reach preventing employees from having access to these items. Items that need to be manually picked should be lowered to more appropriate heights prior to being selected.
- Use "Pick Sticks" or "Bow Peep" hooks to pull small, light-weight product closer to employees prior to lifting.
- Utilize gravity fed flow racks. Slower moving products that are fairly compact can be stored using gravity fed flow racks. These racks not only help with placing the product at the correct height but also help with warehouse spacing issues.
- Use scissors lifts equipped with turntables to elevate pallets within a slot bin. The best technique is to place this device into a tall bin. A lift table will lower in height under the weight of a pallet as it is loaded and then will raise the load as items are removed. The use of a turntable also allows employees to reposition the load which keeps the item close to the body.
- Use an automatic plastic wrapping machine with the palletized product sitting on a turntable. This reduces the possibility of employees bending at the waist to wrap the pallet.
- Consider hands-free wearable scanners. These scanners allow employees to work hands-free and in a neutral body position reducing the risk of injury. It also improves packing productivity.
- Set realistic deadlines and production standards. Allow workers to control the pace of jobs within reason to reduce pressure and prevent unsafe work practices.
- Train Employees. Provide employees with an overview of the potential risk of injuries, their causes and symptoms, prevention ideas and treatment protocols.

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Specific training ideas should include:

- Do not place objects on the floor if they must be picked up later. Use a table, a platform, or a hoist device.
- Leave enough room to be able to turn your feet, instead of your hips or shoulders. Never twist and bend at the same time.
- Use proper lifting techniques – handle objects close to the body. Don't reach out to pick up an object. Get help with bulky loads.
- Push objects instead of pulling whenever possible. Avoid jerking to lift or pull the load.

- Encourage employees to get proper exercise and to maintain a well-balanced diet.

For more information on warehouse ergonomics visit:

www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/grocerywarehousing/index.html

If you need assistance in evaluating your ergonomics or safety and health program, please contact Neal Freedman, John Cotnam, Margie Lobaton, or Mark Hickox from Atlantic Charter's Safety and Health Department at (617) 488-6500.