

## **Back Injury Prevention**

This safety talk is designed for discussion leaders to use in preparing safety meetings. Set a specific time and date for your safety meeting. Publicize your meeting so everyone involved will be sure to attend.

Review this safety talk before the meeting and become familiar with its content. Make notes about the points made in this talk that pertain to your workplace. You should be able to present the material in your own words and lead the discussion without reading it. Collect whatever materials and props you will need ahead of time. Try to use equipment in your workplace to demonstrate your points.

### **BEGINNING THE MEETING**

Give the safety talk in your own words. Use the printed talk merely as a guide. The purpose of a safety meeting is to initiate discussion of safety problems and provide solutions to those problems. Encourage employees to discuss hazards or potential hazards they encounter on the job. Ask them to suggest ways to improve safety in their area.

Don't let the meeting turn into a gripe session about unrelated topics. As discussion leader, it's your job to make sure the topic is safety. Discussing other topics wastes time and can ruin the effectiveness of your safety meeting. At the end of the meeting, ask employees to sign a sheet on the back of this talk as a record that they attended the safety meeting. Keep this talk on file for your records.

### **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Most of you have probably heard that in order to lift safely, you must lift properly. You're told to 'bend your knees not your back,' and 'don't twist as you lift.' This is good advice but sometimes it seems to go against human nature. Yet, there are actions you can take to help you lift properly.

1. Get as close to the load as possible. The further the load is from the center line of your body, the greater the strain imposed on your back. If need be, squat down to lift the load and pull it between your legs. This gets it closer to the center of your body and helps prevent the need to bend at the waist. However, since your leg muscles are the largest muscles in your body, they are the biggest energy consumers. Repeated squatting can be very fatiguing, and reduces a person's ability to lift in this manner for any length of time. In addition to lifting the load, you are also

- hoisting the majority of your body weight. For repeated lifting, other strategies must be used.
2. Avoid picking up heavy objects placed below your knees. Try to see that heavy objects are placed and stored above knee level and below shoulder level. If you suspect the load is too heavy to be lifted comfortably, do not chance it. Use a mechanical aid, break the load down into its component parts, or get help. The most common cause of back injury is overloading.
  3. Keep your back straight. This means don't bend at the waist when reaching to lift an object. Keep the natural arch in your lower back, which distributes the load evenly over the surface of spinal disks, and is less stressful than if the disk is pinched between vertebrae. Bending principally from the hips is acceptable if you maintain the arch in your back, rather than bending at the waist.
  4. Glue your hand to your thigh. If you carry a load in one hand, such as when carrying a tool box, place your free hand on the outside of your thigh and mentally 'glue' it into position. This will help you maintain correct back alignment rather than lifting and tilting to one side. When carrying a heavy load, side bending can be just as stressful to the spine as bending forward.
  5. Tighten your stomach muscles. This technique helps prevent your spine from twisting. If you lift a load and need to place it off to one side, turn by moving your feet. After repeated lifts you might find yourself getting a bit sloppy and forgetting to move your feet. You can overcome this tendency if the place you set the load down is at least one step away from where it is lifted. If you wear a back support belt, wear it low on your trunk and loosen it when you are not lifting.
  6. Stay in good physical condition. A protruding stomach is an extra load carried away from the center line of the body, and prevents you from keeping a lifted object close-the number one rule for back care. When you bend at the waist to lift, due to the leverage principle, the load is up to 10 times heavier than its actual weight. A 'pot belly' puts extra, stressful weight on the spine.
  7. Stretch and loosen up before work. Research has shown that trunk flexibility and mobility is significantly lower in the morning than later in the day, increasing the number and severity of back strains at this time. A few minutes of stretching can warm up cold stiff muscles and tendons and help you avoid an injury. All professional athletes know this-'industrial athletes' should too!

## **GENERAL SAFETY REVIEW**

This is a time to review all safety concerns, not just today's topic. Keep your notes on this page before, during and after the safety meeting.

Are you aware of any safety hazards from any other crews? Point out any hazards other crews are creating that this crew should know about. Tell the crew what you intend to do about those hazards.

Do we have any other safety business? Discuss any past issues or problems. Report any progress of investigations and action taken.

Have there been any accidents, near misses or complaints? Discuss any accidents, near misses, and complaints that have happened since the last safety meeting. Also recognize the safety contributions made by members of the crew.

Please remember, we want to hear from you about any health and safety issues that come up. If we don't know about problems, we can't take action to fix them.

## **ENDING THE MEETING**

Circulate Sign-Off Form.

Assign one or more crew member(s) to help with next safety meeting.

Refer action items for follow-up.

Do you have any Safety Recommendations?

---

---

Do you have any Job Specific Topics you would like us to discuss?

---

---

Comments:

---

---