# BIE SAFETY ADVISOR

Syracuse Builders Exchange, NY

August 2010


## WELLNESS TOO EXPENSIVE?

**THE FEDS WANT TO HELP**

You'd love to see all your employees stop smoking, start getting enough exercise and make healthy lifestyle choices.

But you can't just snap your fingers and make it happen.

It's true. Wellness programs can pay for themselves with reduced comp and insurance costs—as well as increased productivity. But finding the resources to get an initiative off the ground can be a challenge for any business.

Help may be on the way.

**MONEY FOR PREVENTION**

Here's a provision of the recently passed healthcare legislation that got comparatively little attention: Small businesses that initiate wellness programs for their employees will be eligible for at least $200 million in grants between 2011 and 2016.

The details are still being hammered out, and the Department of Health and Human Services still has to develop an application process, but this much is known. To be eligible, employers must:

- Not have had a wellness program as of March 23, 2010
- Have fewer than 100 employees working 25 or more hours a week
- Include health education and assessments and preventive screenings
- Provide mechanisms or incentives that promote employee participation, and
- Support and encourage healthier lifestyles through counseling, seminars, online programs, etc.

Source: Injury Prevention & Cost Control Alert, 6/4/2010

## 7 KEY MEASUREMENTS THAT RESULT IN FEWER INJURIES AND LOWER COSTS

**HINT: They don't come from OSHA**

It's been an ongoing debate among safety professionals.

What's the best way to measure safety: by after-the-fact stats like accidents or worker's comp costs (trailing indicators which tend to be negative), or proactive safety measures, leading indicators, like frequency of training, which tend to be positive?

The answer: Both work about equally as well to predict how safe a company will be in the future.

That's the conclusion of extensive research by Steve Wurzelbacher of NIOSH.

Wurzelbacher presented his research, conducted over several years with hundreds of Midwest manufacturing companies, at the annual American Industrial Hygiene conference & expo (AIHCE) in Denver.

"It's important because you tend to focus on what you measure," Wurselbacher said.

**Workers' comp rates fair**

As for trailing indicators (the after-the-fact recording of bad stuff that happens), the research showed that workers' compensation insurance costs were the best indicator of safety—or lack of it—more so than OSHA logs or the total recordable rate (TRR).

Apparently workers' comp carriers know what they're doing when they base their premiums on your experience modifier ratings. A big part of workers' comp costs was the care for musculoskeletal disorders, so companies that were able to reduce ergonomic injuries fared the best.

**The best positive measurements**

What companies did after a loss occurred and a comp claim had already been filed was also important in reducing post-loss severity. Medical case management, return-to-work programs, early reporting and prompt claims handling helped reduce costs and improved safety in the future.

In the research, companies were asked to rate themselves on how well they thought they did on the most commonly used leading positive indicators of proactive safety programs.

Companies that rated themselves highest in this area also had the fewest injuries in future years.

- Safety training frequency
- Ergonomic controls
- Compliance checklists
- Good housekeeping/maintenance
- Management leadership
- Employee participation
- Job-design standards, and
- Safety-focused purchasing policies to prevent bringing ergonomic problems into the plant in the first place.

Source: Safety Compliance Alert, 7/8/2010


Publisher: Building Industry Employers of New York State

Jack Endryck, Managing Director

1.800.344.1841

Editor: Northeast Builders Services (NEBS) 585.586.1564

MONTHLY TOOLBOX TALK

# *HAND-ARM VIBRATION SYNDROME (HAVS)*

Is This a Problem In The Workplace For your Employees? According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, it is. The agency estimates more than 1.5 million Americans face exposure. Eight percent of these workers say they operate vibrating tools for more than four hours each day. Of the 1.5 million workers exposed, half will develop symptoms related to hand-arm vibration. By understanding the risk factors and effective control measures, you can help your employees reduce injuries and related costs, and improve their safety and comfort.

**About HAVS**

HAVS is a chronic disorder that develops when the hand is subject to repeated and prolonged exposure to vibration, resulting in irreversible damage to the blood vessels, nerves, and muscles. Because HAVS has a latency period of a few months or even years before the first symptoms appear, the disorder is particularly serious. Symptoms include episodic tingling and numbness initially, eventually escalating into painful spasms and blanching of one or more fingers.

**Getting to the Source of the Problem**

Vibration comes from many sources, including handheld power tools, stationary tools that transmit vibration through a work piece, and vehicles. While it's the prolonged exposure to vibration that damages the hand several key factors influence the latency period. These factors include levels of acceleration, vibration frequency, tightness of the user's grip, and number of hours exposed per day and per year. Other contributing factors include tool design, cold temperatures, dampness, and lifestyle habits such as tobacco and drug use.

**Industries and Job Applications with Employees at Risk of HAVS**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Abrasion Resistant** | **Hammer Rotary** |
| **Appliance Impact** | **Power Tools** |
| **Automotive** | **Jack Hammers** |
| **Aircraft** | **Logging** |
| **Chisels** | **Material Handling** |
| **Cold Resistant** | **Power Hammers** |
| **Construction** | **Riveters** |
| **Drills** | **Saw Drills** |
| **Foundries** | **Sanders** |
| **General Maintenance** | **Trucking** |
| **Grinders** | **Warehousing** |

By adopting generally accepted ergonomic principles, companies can reduce the exposure and associated risks. These include medical monitoring, engineering controls, training and education, job rotation, ergonomically designed tools, and anti-vibration gloves to help dampen vibration and keep hands warm and dry.

**Recommending Anti-vibration and Impact Gloves**

There are many styles and manufacturers of anti-vibration and impact gloves available on the market today all with many different damping materials. Only gloves that are full finger in design should be considered "anti-vibration". How do you know what to recommend to your employees? Proper glove selection largely depends on the type of job and the risk factors involved. The operation of a power tool requires an effective vibration-absorbing material. The U.S. currently does not have a standard in place to test the effectiveness of anti-vibration gloves. However, the International standard ISO 10819, followed by Europe and most of Asia, offers an effective guideline for anti-vibration certification. If vibration damping is the main concern, then you should only recommend the full finger certified glove.