



Reducing Strain Injuries

Background: Since 2005, injuries related to strain and overexertion have amounted to over \$2,000,000 for NJPHA-JIF members. These injuries can be better attacked by reducing the hazard, rather than applying general training. The following are tips for avoiding injuries due to strains.

In ranking strategies to reduce injuries, many organizations gravitate to training as the primary means of reducing injury. However, it is generally conceded by safety professionals to be the least effective means of reducing injury, since it depends on how the individual student applies the training, and whether the real world situation allows the student to use the techniques taught.

Maintenance personnel often accept manual lifting as a routine part of the job. Back belts, which are used by a number of employers, have not been proven to be effective in lifting heavy objects, based on a number of studies. They need not be removed from those who are using them, but employees currently using these belts should be monitored to assure that they are using them properly, and are not attempting to lift beyond their capability because of the belt. The upper limit for manual lifting is generally no more than 50 lb. There are other opportunities to reduce some of the exposures to lifting in the tasks associated with public housing maintenance.

Lifting / Moving Appliances

Moving appliance and furniture often involves team lifting, and situations where good handholds cannot be achieved. Negotiating stairs where elevators may not be available can increase the hazard, as the lifters struggle to maintain a grip while navigating the steps. A solution to this problem can be the use of appliance lifting straps, which allow the lifters to utilize the strongest muscles in the body, the legs. These are available from a number of sources. Entering the words “appliance lifting straps” on a web search engine will uncover multiple vendors. These are available in forearm and over-the-head variations.

Hand trucks and carts are a simple and effective means of moving heavy objects, and should be utilized whenever possible. Never lift anything that can be rolled!

Moving appliance from a central location often involves loading a pick-up truck. Once again, putting one lifter at a higher level than the other can create an awkward and hazardous situation. A better solution is to equip pick-ups with lift gates, which allow the object to be slid on at ground level.

Lifting from pallets, often the case with bagged materials like salt, or cement, can be facilitated by simply putting an extra pallet or two under the loaded pallet. Raising the material lifted off the ground just a few inches dramatically reduces the strain on the back.

Investing in equipment to reduce these hazards can usually be more cost effective than the expense of training employees on techniques they will not, or cannot use.

If you have questions, please contact your Risk Management Consultant, or Jim Rhoads, NJPHA-JIF Safety Director, 610-937-2694, or e-mail james_rhoads@pmagroup.com

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