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Toolbox Talk
Preventing Back Injuries

Friday, May 10

Workers are at risk of back injuries, whether they are on a construction site or sit at a desk all day long. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, over one million workers suffer from back injuries every year. Common causes of back injury include:

Force – A back injury may arise when too much force is exerted upon the worker's back when lifting or moving a heavy object.

Repetition – The repetition of certain movements and having a slouching posture for too long are both causes of muscle fatigue and injury.

Lifestyle – There are many medical conditions and lifestyle choices that contribute to back injuries such as obesity, sleeping position, smoking and stress.

There are many ways to prevent a workplace back injury from occurring, including:

- **Making exercise a part of your daily routine.** One of the best ways to prevent back pain is to keep your back muscles strong. Do back strengthening and stretching exercises at least two days a week.

- **Paying attention to your posture.** When standing, balance your weight evenly on your feet. Do not slouch.

- **To promote good posture when sitting, choose a chair that supports your spinal curves.** Adjust the height of your chair so that your feet rest flat on the floor or on a footrest and your thighs are parallel to the floor. Periodically walk around and gently stretch your muscles to relieve tension.

- **Modifying repetitive tasks.** Use lifting devices, when available, to help you lift loads. Try to alternate physically demanding tasks with less demanding ones. Avoid unnecessary bending, twisting and reaching.

- **If you work at a computer, make sure that your monitor, keyboard, mouse and chair are positioned properly.** If you frequently talk on the phone and type or write at the same time, place your phone on speaker or use a headset.

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Using proper lifting techniques by incorporating Plan>Do>Check>Act

- **Plan**
    - Before you lift, plan ahead. Be aware of the weight of the object and determine whether or not it's safe to lift on your own.
    - Make sure the work area is flat, dry and clear of debris.
- **Do**
    - Have a second person help when lifting awkward or heavy loads.
    - Use lift assists, a forklift, dolly, cart, hand truck or hoist if needed.
    - Always wear proper PPE.
    - Use the appropriate technique when lifting the object.
- **Check**
    - When lifting, check that you have:
        - Positioned your feet approximately shoulder wide for a stable base.
        - Bent your knees, not your waist.
        - Tightened your stomach muscles. Abdominal muscles help support your spine when you lift.
- **Act**
    - Lift with your legs, not your back.
    - Keep the load close. Don't hold the load away from your body.
    - Avoid twisting and turning your back. To turn, shift the position of your feet.

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