

CHAPTER 14
Back Injury Prevention Methods

14-1. Purpose. The purpose of a back injury prevention program is to stress the significance of prevention and protect the workforce from experiencing back injuries.

14-2. Background. Back injuries represent the most common type of workers' compensation claims in general industry, constituting about 25% of all claims. An estimated 7 out of 10 people will experience back pain sometime during their life. About 80% of these injuries are a result of sprains and strains caused by overexertion and improper lifting techniques.

14-3. Key Elements.

- a. Management support to control and reduce back injuries.
- b. Follow-up medical care for injured personnel.
- c. Job analysis to determine physical requirements to perform work.
- d. Training programs in back injury prevention and care.

14-4. Supervisor Responsibilities.

a. Review operations and activities and ensure that employees involved in materials handling know the key skills associated with those tasks. Refresher training material is available from the Safety Office.

b. Correct improper material handling practices and commend employees who use proper procedures.

c. Request process reviews through the Safety Office for possible use of machinery to replace manual material handling.

d. Investigate employee complaints of sore backs to determine cause. If the cause is job related, take corrective actions to prevent future injuries.

e. Setting an upper limit for maximum weights to be lifted is difficult. Individual differences in strength, age, health and other variables must be considered. One must consider the size of the object, frequency of the lift, whether the item is to be lifted from the floor, a table, or a shelf. A test lift should be used to determine if an item is too heavy or awkward and help is required; 40 pounds may be used as a general guideline. Employees shall consider assistance whenever items in excess of this guideline must be lifted. In addition, employees shall request assistance when lifting if they feel excessive strain (no matter what the weight being handled). Bulky or awkward items may present problems even though they are under the 35-pound guideline.