



MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS IN WORKERS

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

- More than 520,000 lost workdays caused by musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are reported each year – more than one third of all the lost workdays resulting from occupational injuries and illnesses.
- Employers with leading safety and health programs in numerous industries report that the number of MSDs can be reduced with appropriate design and management of work environments, equipment, tasks, and tools.
- The challenge is to assist all employers in developing, evaluating, and adopting effective practices to protect employees.

WHAT HAS NIOSH ACCOMPLISHED?

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has provided widely requested guidance on preventing work-related MSDs. In addition, NIOSH continues to conduct and fund research addressing many aspects of the relationship between MSDs and both work-related and non-work-related factors, including physical and psychological stressors. NIOSH supports approximately 50 projects in these areas.

Example of program in action:

Nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants at nursing homes experience the largest number of reported cases of work-related back pain. NIOSH is collaborating with BJC Health System, EZ Way Inc., and ArjoCentury Inc. to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of a best practices back injury prevention program for reducing the incidence, severity, and cost of back and other musculoskeletal injuries among nursing home personnel. Use of state-of-the-art lifting equipment has been demonstrated to completely eliminate the exposure to low-back stress associated with manually helping residents to stand and sit. Data for six nursing homes indicate that with use of such equipment, there was a 61% reduction in injury rates and a 37% reduction in worker's compensation expenses related to patient lifting and transferring. Results of this evaluation will be published in 2004 and have been presented to several groups interested in approaches to back-injury prevention.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

NIOSH has issued the National Occupational Research Agenda for Musculoskeletal Disorders. It provides a blueprint for advancing research on MSDs by identifying high-priority research problems. The agenda was developed with the extensive involvement of industry, labor, academia, and government experts. NIOSH will work with partners in the public and private sectors to implement this research agenda, while continuing to provide information and assistance to workplaces.

Additional information is available at www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ergonomics/. For more information on other NIOSH programs, visit www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/pib/.

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