

Material Handling and Lifting

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Did you know that the most common injuries that resulted in employees missing work were the result of "overexertion in lifting and lowering?"¹ Overexertion injuries include strains, sprains pulled muscles and repetitive motion injuries. Soft tissue back injuries in particular are some of the most expensive and debilitating types of injuries that occur in the workplace today. Rising medical costs will only add to the outlay in the coming years.

Automotive industry employees are especially susceptible to these types of injuries as a result of the tasks that they perform at work. A body man's day is spent bending over, crouching, sanding, pushing and pulling sheet metal. Service technicians lean over engine compartments, repairing and removing transmissions and engine parts daily. Other employees receive, move and stock transmissions, batteries, engines and other heavy parts regularly.

Material handling guidelines

- Provide necessary material handling equipment including transmission jacks, engine hoists, floor jacks, car pushers, pallet jacks and forklift trucks.
- Train technicians on how to use shop equipment and conduct periodic performance checks to ensure that they are following company procedures.
- Maintain equipment in safe operating condition.
- Provide employee training on safe lifting and material handling. Integrate training into actual work situations to be most effective.

- Floors should be kept clean, dry and free of oil.
- Arrange tools, materials and equipment in close proximity to the technicians.
- Provide conveyors to move parts up to second floor storage areas to eliminate lifting and carrying injuries.

Proper lifting techniques for employee training

- Think before you lift.
- Assess what you are about to lift and know where you're going to put it down.
- Don't lift the object if it is too heavy; get help.
- Bend at the knees, not your waist.
- Firm up your stomach muscles.
- Hug the object you are lifting; get it as close to your body as possible.
- Lift with your leg muscles.

These lifting techniques are generally accepted guidelines, but they can't overcome an individual employee's physical limitations.

Taking the time to educate your employees on material handling and safe lifting techniques can help protect their health and physical well-being as well as help reduce your loss exposure for costly Workers' compensation claims.

1. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Report as cited in Business Insider. Nov. 2012. <http://www.businessinsider.com/most-common-workplace-injury-in-america-2012-11#ixzz3SxSC68ku>

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