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## Breathing Easy—Use That Respirator

Respirators protect workers from a variety of conditions, including insufficient oxygen and harmful dusts, smokes and sprays that are known to cause cancer, lung damage, other serious diseases and even death.

Approximately five million workers are required to wear some type of respirator while on the job. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) reminds employers that certain types of respirators are effective for some jobs but not others and that an employee wearing the wrong respiratory equipment could be seriously injured or killed.

OSHA reminds employers that they must:

- Conduct an exposure assessment. This will

help employers determine the type and level of hazardous exposure.

- Know the different types of respiration equipment and their characteristics.

- Understand other factors involved in the type of equipment used, including conditions of specific worksites and workers.

OSHA also recommends that employers assess the employee's comfort factor when breathing through a respirator. Employees who are uncomfortable are more likely to remove the equipment when working.

For more information on specifics and regulations pertaining to respirators, visit [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov). ■



## Injuries Not Covered

Many business owners do not realize that workers compensation does not cover every work-related illness or injury. Although such benefits vary by state, [www.nolo.com](http://www.nolo.com), an online legal resource, lists the following types of injuries that workers compensation might not cover:

- Injuries resulting from the employee's intoxication and/or use of illegal drugs.
- Injuries that are self-inflicted, such as those suffered by an employee who starts a fight.
- Injuries incurred while the employee

is committing a serious crime.

- Injuries suffered when the employee's conduct is in violation of company policy.
- Injuries that are not work-related, even if they occur during work hours or on employer property.

We can help you educate your employees on workplace injury risk factors and help them understand the risks they face and where coverage does and does not apply. If you'd like to plan an education session, give us a call. ■

## Thumbing Away at the PDA



**T**endonitis, swelling and throbbing hands are not just symptoms of age or heavy lifting. They are conditions reported by people who overuse personal digital assistants (PDAs)—conditions that can lead to workers compensation claims.

Alan Hedge, an ergonomics professor at Cornell University, says that these are full-blown symptoms of repetitive motion injury—a condition that commonly leads to medical treatment and missed work and spells trouble for employers who issue versions of the handy handhelds to busy workers.

In addition to reminding employers of the risks of handhelds, Hedge notes that employers can play an active role in preventing this type of injury without stripping all staffers of their PDAs. He advises employers to instruct workers in proper use of PDAs upon issue and to ask employees to minimize handheld typing by composing longer e-mails via a different method. ■

## Why Safety Training?

Here are five reasons to invest in safety training:

1. **Save money.** The National Council on Compensation Insurance reports that a typical accident involving physical injury costs approximately \$10,000. The average safety-training program costs less than \$2,000.

2. **Prevent accidents.** Well-trained supervisors and employees understand the proper procedures for performing a job safely. They know the right way to use equipment, lift heavy objects and respond to an emergency. Well-trained staffers will not only help prevent injury to themselves, but can also protect others. These people can be your eyes in the field.

3. **Maintain productivity.** The Bureau of Labor Statistics says one in four non-fatal, work-related illnesses and injuries involve days of missed work. Time spent replacing injured workers results in lost productivity.

4. **Improve compliance.** Well-trained workers understand the rules and are more capable of making sure they are followed. This helps reduce the employer's exposure to regulatory issues and fines from safety organizations such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

5. **Benefit your workers and your bottom line.** Keeping claims down sends a message to employees that you care about their safety while reducing your workers compensation premiums. ■

## Trips, Slips and Falls

Trips, slips and falls are common workplace mishaps that can cause a range of injuries—from scraped knees to broken bones to life-threatening head injuries.

Preventing trips, slips and falls can be as simple as good housekeeping. Training staff to close drawers, cover cords and wipe up spills is a good start. However, other measures should be taken to ensure worker safety.

- *Inspect workspaces for uneven flooring.* Look for "bubbles" in carpeting, cracked tiles and any other potential source of a slip.

- *Make sure employees are putting tools and materials back in their proper places* after use rather than leaving things sitting around.

- *Monitor lighting.* Not everyone is blessed with great vision. People often



trip or slip on something that's normally visible but wasn't seen due to poor or absent lighting.

- *Mark problem areas clearly.* Use bright, colorful signs to mark areas of the floor that always seem slick, or an unexpected first step, in order to catch the attention of walkers. ■

## What to Watch For

As an employer, you have the responsibility of making sure employees act in a manner that minimizes the chances of injury for all workers. Staffmark, a leading staffing agency, addresses areas of concern that commonly result in injury if not controlled. Here are some guidelines:

- *Do not allow staff to stand on chairs, tables or desks to reach items.* If there are items in your workplace stored beyond the reach of workers who might need access to them, make sure there is someone nearby who can retrieve the item without assistance. If this does not work, invest in a stepping

stool, ladder or some other stable device.

- *Watch how they lift.* Injuries



resulting from improper lifting are some of the most common in the workplace. Make sure employees

understand proper lifting techniques, such as testing the load before lifting, keeping objects close to the body, and lifting with the legs, not the back.

- *Keep employees within their element.* It is not uncommon for workload or other distractions to cause one employee to request help from another. Although the employee may think this is no big deal, they must realize that the other person might not be trained to operate certain tools or equipment properly. Employees

cannot assume that everyone at work knows the right way to perform every job. ■

## Work Comp—Not Exclusive to the Job Site

**B**ecause work-related illness or injury can occur away from your worksite, it's important to select the right personnel for field or travel duties.

An employee injured while traveling on business might be entitled to workers comp benefits. Staffers injured running errands for the business or visiting a business client might also be covered. Recently, workers comp benefits have been extended to employees injured during team-building exercises and while attending a business-related social event.

Managing safety is much

easier when everyone works on site. However, for many types of businesses this is not possible. Sending employees

**Selecting the lowest worker on the totem pole to run errands and man booths might not be the wisest option.**

into the field is an extension of your business and its liability. Selecting the lowest worker on the totem pole to run errands and man booths

might not be the wisest option, since those with less training and experience are more prone to accidents.

Choosing qualified personnel for off-site jobs can lower your risk exposure.

Consider training a pool of employees to handle off-site work to cover the possibility that someone would be needed at the spur of the moment. A class in travel safety might also lower the risk for your employees who travel on business.

Review your workers comp policy to become familiar with your coverage for off-site business activities. Any questions? Give us a call. ■

**Thank you for  
your referrals.**

If you're pleased with us,  
spread the word! We'll be  
happy to give the same great  
service to all of your friends  
and business associates.

## Lean, Mean Cleaning Machine

Everyone says, "I'll get around to it," but many never do. Others think that clutter symbolizes "busy." Clutter, however, creates a workplace hazard that can significantly increase the risk of injury, says the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

Messy offices hide existing hazards and produce new ones. Excessive clutter on a desk reduces workspace comfort and can lead to strain injuries. Stacks of boxes increase the frequency of trips and falls. Piles of "stuff" on the floor can shield cords, steps and slippery spots that can bring even the best-balanced person down. Such reckless storage of materials may also create fire hazards.

OSHA recommends all employers block time to straighten up the workplace. This seemingly simple suggestion provides a proven method to reduce workplace accidents. ■

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