



AGC 5 STAR SERVICE

SAFETY

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SOFT TISSUE INJURIES IN CONSTRUCTION

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Soft tissue injuries involving the muscles, tendons, ligaments or nerves account for over 30% of the injury claims in the construction industry. NIOSH identified the number of back injuries in U.S. construction was 50% higher than the average for all other U.S. industries. Backaches and pain in the shoulders, neck, arms, and hands were the most common symptoms reported by construction workers in one study (Cook et al, 1996). The nature of the physical demand on the workers body explains why musculoskeletal disorders, repetitive injuries, sprains and strains are so prevalent in the workplace. Many construction workers admit they continue to work while being hurt or in pain. This not only reduces productivity but can lead to disabling injuries that will end a worker's career early. With a workforce in construction that is aging, the employer must take precautions to minimize the risks to these types of injuries.

How does an employer develop a program to reduce soft tissue injuries? It is not easy to introduce new work practices, redesigned tools, or programs that address the problem. There is a natural tendency to resist change even if it is likely to have a positive outcome. Workers become comfortable with the old ways, so it can take time to implement new policies and procedures. Management should encourage worker participation and input. Every suggestion is worth considering. It is important to identify hazards on the job that lead to soft tissue injuries. Workplace risk factors include repetitive motions, heavy lifting, working overhead, kneeling, squatting, awkward positioning and exposure to vibration. Proper assessment of the injury risk factors will lead to a combined strategy of tool redesign, material handling evaluation, work process modifications accompanied by worker training.

An effective program requires that management is committed to the process including providing the necessary resources to insure its success. The reward will be a safe and healthy work environment with an increase in productivity, improved worker morale and a reduction in injury related costs.