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FIT Ergonomics: Keeping your work force safe and healthy

What Costs Corporate America a Billion Dollars a Week and is Getting Worse?

By Dennis Downing



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Workers compensation costs have been a growing problem for years. Back injuries, carpal tunnel and other very prevalent and costly injuries cost corporate America over a billion dollars per week.

How many companies have to go out of business; lay employees off; move out of state; curtail growth; see valuable and loyal employees struck down with an injury before the real source of this profit-draining problem is discovered and resolved?

I think we can chisel this in granite regarding Workers Compensation Costs:

"If the problem persists—then the true cause has not been discovered."

A leaky roof will continue to drip until you find and repair the exact source of the leak. People, in general, do not like problems that won't resolve. We aim to solve them in order to make our home and work lives more enjoyable and productive. We seem to have been born with innate logic that attempts to discover the source of problems—to then effectively eliminate them from reoccurring.

So what's up with the spiraling costs of workers comp that just won't go away? In fact, in most cases, it is getting worse.

Companies of all sizes are affected by this problem. The solutions have typically been:

- *Investments in return-to-work programs*
- *Utilization review*
- *Claims management*
- *Management of the care*
- *Manage what physicians to use*
- *Conferences to discover how to manage workers compensation costs better*
- *In California "The Terminator" was elected on a promise to fix the problem.*

Yet, workers compensation managers, while working to close today's claims, know that tomorrow brings with it a whole stack of new ones to work on. This is a no win situation.

The workers compensation problem continues to rage, mostly, unabated. This can only mean one thing: the true source of the problem has yet to be addressed. Is there one basic element that if addressed, would result in a dramatic decrease in workers compensation costs? That is the \$50 Billion question—what is the real problem and what is its effective solution?

The answer lies in the fact that we are trying to solve the wrong problem. The "strategies" described above are being vigorously employed by workers compensation professionals are all *post* injury strategies. These strategies can be effective to lower the costs of claims. However, companies have fallen into a trap of believing the only way to solve

workers compensation costs is to control the costs *after* the injury. That will never solve the problem as evidenced by the out-of-control costs.

What is the one thing that if addressed would solve this decade old problem? The lowest common denominator is the injured worker! If employees' injuries are controlled, workers compensation costs are controlled.

The best way to manage a workers compensation claim is to prevent it from happening in the first place. There is now evidence that a proven training methodology exists that prevents back injuries, carpal tunnel and other work related MSD's (Musculoskeletal Disorders).

It can be done for both small and large organizations. By way of example, over the last few years a major airline reduced workers compensation costs by over \$3 million during a 10 month period; a small hospital lowered costs from \$330,000 per year to \$12,000; a newspaper lowered lost workdays by 1,000 days and a county assessor's office virtually eliminated repetitive stress injuries.

There is no conflict of purpose from the workforce. Employees do not want to become injured. Employers do not want employees to become injured. Unions do not want their members injured. Thus, there is no conflict of purpose. This in itself creates a great environment to succeed in.

Employees do embrace learning how to control their own well being. The training just has to be done properly. Contrary to past opinions, there does exist a training methodology that is proven to prevent back injuries, carpal tunnel syndrome, and other work related MSD's. It has been the only thing missing.

Everyone wins when injuries are prevented. A proactive and proven injury prevention training methodology allows all employers to attack the real cause of workplace injuries. Workers compensation costs can now be assertively controlled. Everyone WINS.

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BACKSAFE/SITTINGSAFE® Injury Prevention Programs

This article may be reprinted in its entirety provided that the following resource area is left intact:

Dennis Downing is the founder and President of Future Industrial Technologies, Inc., a nationwide Industrial Injury Prevention Training Company. It specializes in improving conditions at work and in life by utilizing the proprietary injury prevention programs, BACKSAFE® and SITTINGSAFE®, that have proven to be highly successful.

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