

# Safety Topic

Safety News

State Compensation Insurance Fund

Issue Three, 2009



## Protect Your Back

**A**lthough repeated manual lifting of heavy materials is the single most common cause of back injury, it can result from simple tasks if done in awkward positions. Think about how you work and move correctly to protect your back. You'll be able to work longer and more comfortably.

Position yourself as close to your work as possible. There's less strain on your back if the work is between your shoulders and knees, with a waist-high level being the most comfortable. You may need to raise or lower yourself with a stool or ladder for better positioning. Avoid over-reaching and when reaching down, put one hand on your thigh to support your back.

You can strain your back if you work in an awkward or twisted position or if you bend and use your back for support rather than your leg muscles. Bend your knees and squat down to get closer to the work if it's below your waist. If you must squat for a long time, alternate kneeling down on one knee to transfer the load off your legs and back or sit on a stool or crate.



Before lifting, consider the weight, size, and shape of the load. Face the object directly and move close to it. Bend your knees and grasp the object with your whole hand. Tuck in your elbows and arms while keeping your body weight centered and your back straight. Tuck in your chin to straighten your spine and neck. Lift by straightening your legs in a smooth, continuous movement; avoid jerking and twisting. If you must lift above your waist level, reposition your grip to keep the weight centered. To

lower a load, reverse the procedure. If you're not sure you can handle a load, get help from another worker or a mechanical lift. But remember, equipment can put strain on your body if you push or pull it incorrectly.

Over-exertion, previous injury, bad posture, overweight, lack of exercise, lax stomach muscles, and age can increase your chance of back injury. So, keep yourself in good physical condition. Get proper rest, eat healthy, drink plenty of water, and do some warm-up stretches before work. □

### TOPIC REVIEW

Instructor \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

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#### Safety Recommendations

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# Safety News

News about Occupational Safety and Health in  
Agriculture

**STATE**  
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Loss Control Services

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SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94142-0807



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Please forward to the person responsible for your safety program

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News about Occupational Safety and Health in Agriculture

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## Employer Education Series

State Fund continues to promote community educational outreach by increasing the quantity and frequency of employer seminars. These seminars are produced and sponsored by State Fund and are open to State Fund policyholders. The seminar topics cover all aspects of worker's compensation and are offered statewide.

As part of State Fund's Employer Education Series, the local State Fund Loss Control departments offer safety seminars dedicated to loss prevention. They feature safety training targeted to specific industries and safety topics of interest to California employers. Various programs in the series are developed in conjunction with State Fund insured Group Programs and external affiliates and partners. Some of these partners are occupational safety and health providers such as Cal/OSHA Consultation Service, the Department of Health Services, and the University of California.

The goal of State Fund's Employer Education Series is to present valuable information from recognized safety and health experts to enable employers to reduce the frequency and severity of workplace injuries, facilitate regulatory compliance, and increase business profits.

The program venues provide the opportunity for attendees to have their workplace safety questions immediately and personally answered by industry experts. The typically half-day seminars are usually held at regional State Fund offices. To learn what programs are scheduled in your area, visit [www.scif.com](http://www.scif.com) and click on Seminars. □

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## Reporting Work-Related Injuries

State Fund's Claims Reporting Center (1-888-222-3211) is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for policyholders to report injuries as soon as they occur. Agents will do the necessary paperwork to get the claim started and refer the injured to the designated physician or provider.

Within 8 hours of any serious illness or injury (requiring hospitalization over 24 hours, other than for medical observation or where there is permanent employee disfigurement) or death occurring in the workplace or in connection with employment, employers must report the incident to the Division of Occupational Safety and Health. □

This Agricultural Safety News is produced by the Safety and Health Services Department of State Fund to assist clients in their loss control efforts. Information or recommendations contained in this publication were obtained from sources believed to be reliable at the date of publication. Information is only advisory and does not presume to be exhaustive or inclusive of all workplace hazards or situations. Permission to reprint articles subject to approval by State Compensation Insurance Fund.

Published by State Compensation Insurance Fund Safety and Health Services Department. Editor: Judy Kerry

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REMEMBER TO RECYCLE  
THIS NEWSLETTER

# Safety News

S T A T E C O M P E N S A T I O N I N S U R A N C E F U N D

## Cultivate A Safe Harvest

**H**arvest season is a busy time of year. It's when many agricultural operations can finally reap the benefits from the many hours of physical work, financial investment, and mental anxiety. Make sure you have a bountiful harvest of profits this season and not one that cultivates profit-draining accidents and injuries by training and enforcing safe work practices for all workers throughout the harvest.

Harvest safety should begin before the crop is ready. Widespread use of powerful, fast, and unforgiving equipment such as combines, tractors, augers, and trucks, coupled with long workdays and the rush to get crops out of the field, can increase the chance of accidents and injuries. Before the busy season starts, harvesting tools and equipment should be checked out and test run so that needed repairs and adjustments can be made. During the season, machinery should be periodically inspected and maintained. A worker's frustration with a faulty machine can lead to chance-taking and impulsive actions that can result in injury.

Workers hired specifically for the harvest often lack the training, experience, and conditioning necessary to do the job safely. And an injury-producing accident can bring crucial harvest

operations to a screeching halt. So, make sure all workers are trained in the safe operation of the equipment they will be using before being placed under the pressure of harvest operations. Review equipment safety warnings and insure that workers follow them whether in the field, in the farm shop or when refueling. Accidents that result in property damage can lead to delays that could

cost hundreds of dollars per lost work hour, to say nothing of repair expense. Many common farm activities involve a lot of bending and lifting, which, if performed incorrectly, puts unnecessary strain on the back and surrounding muscles. Train workers

in the correct way to perform a task and, where possible, adjust work practices to minimize back injury.

Even though long hours may be inevitable, encourage workers to drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration and reduce the risk of heat stress. They should eat and sleep on as regular a schedule as possible, to avoid mistakes due to fatigue or low blood sugar. Breaks should be periodically scheduled during work activities. Rotating tasks can also be beneficial because boredom compounded with fatigue from long harvest hours can lead to a worker's error in judgment. □



ISSUE THREE, 2009

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## The Expert's Corner

# Protecting Workers From Noise-Induced Hearing Loss

**B**eing in compliance with the Cal/OSHA (or Federal OSHA) noise regulations does not always prevent work-related hearing loss or a workers' compensation claim. That's because research indicates that the current regulations simply aren't protective enough.

Cal/OSHA's noise regulations have a permissible noise exposure level (PEL) of 90 dBA (decibels, A-weighted) for 8 hours. The regulations also set an "action level" of 85 dBA. When employees are exposed above this action level, the employer must implement a hearing conservation program that includes annual hearing tests to determine if employees have experienced a hearing loss.

There are two deficiencies with the current regulations that put employees at risk. First, the Cal/OSHA PEL and action level are not protective enough. Secondly, some industries (most notably construction and agriculture) are exempt from having a hearing conservation program. Without annual hearing tests, a worker may not notice (or bring to the attention of the employer) a hearing loss



until it becomes debilitating. Once hearing is lost, the damage is permanent.

There are guidelines for employers that protect employees from the damaging effects of occupational noise. One of these is the threshold limit value (TLV) set by the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH). Another is the recommended exposure limit (REL) set by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Both guidelines recommend an exposure limit of 85 dBA for an 8-hour workday.

Not only do ACGIH and NIOSH guidelines

lower the exposure limit to 85 dBA, they also lower what is called the "exchange rate" from 5 dBA to 3 dBA. When the sound level increases by the decibel value of the exchange rate, the allowed duration is halved. In other words, Cal/OSHA allows an employee to be exposed to 90 dBA for 8-hours, 100 dBA for 4-hours, etc., while ACGIH and NIOSH recommendations allow 85 dBA for 8-hours, 88 dBA for 4-hours, etc. That's quite a difference between what's allowable under the law and what's considered protective. In addition, NIOSH and ACGIH recommendations for annual hearing tests do not exempt any industries.

If you want to save workers from the debilitating effects of hearing loss, and prevent costly workers' compensation claims, protect your employees by following the ACGIH or NIOSH guidelines. □

*Mary Jo Jensen CIH, CSP, is a Certified Industrial Hygienist assigned to State Fund's Sacramento and Redding Districts.*

## Ladder Safety To Prevent Falls

**F**alls from ladders account for a significant number of injuries in agricultural work, especially during harvest season. As orchard workers climb ladders to pick fruit and nuts from high trees and branches, a ladder's unsteady footing combined with the weight of the worker and the filled produce bag presents a potential fall situation. Preventing falls from ladders involves selecting the right ladder for the job, pre-use inspection, securely setting up the ladder and then properly using,

transporting, and storing the ladder.

Before use, instruct workers to check for missing, broken or weakened rungs, side rails, and cleats. They should clean ladder rungs and side rails of oil, grease, or mud to prevent slipping. A defective ladder should be marked as such and taken out of service for replacement or repair.

Wet, grassy, or irrigated areas can leave the ground slick, soft, uneven and not a surface that can adequately support a ladder or a fruit

bearing worker's weight. In wet or uneven ground conditions, the ladder should be placed on a sturdy wooden slab large enough to provide stability and ample support. Ladders should not be used in high wind areas and metal ladders should never be used near live electrical wires or power lines.

Before climbing, workers should check that shoes are free of dirt and grease. When climbing up or down a ladder, workers must face

*Continued on next page*

## Are You Field Sanitation Compliant?

If you own an agricultural business that employs field workers for hand-labor, you must comply with Cal/OSHA's Field Sanitation Standard. The standard requires you to provide potable drinking water, toilets, and hand washing facilities to your hand-laborers in the field.

The standard covers agricultural work done by hand or with hand tools during cultivation, weeding, planting, and harvesting of vegetables, nuts, fruits, seedlings or other crops including mushrooms, and the packing of produce in the field into containers, whether performed on the ground, on moving machinery or in a shed.

Key provisions of the standard require you to provide:

- Sufficient amounts of cool potable drinking water, readily accessible to all field workers in single-use drinking cups or by fountain.
- One toilet and hand washing facility for each 20 workers of each sex, within a quarter mile walk, or if not feasible, at the closest vehicular access point. You can transport your field hand-laborers to toilet and hand washing facilities in either of

the following conditions:

- When workers do field work for less than two hours (including time spent traveling to and from the field), or
- If less than five workers in the company do hand-labor work on any given day
- Facilities maintained according to public health sanitation practices, including: upkeep of water quality through daily change or as often as needed; toilets kept clean, sanitary, and operational; hand washing facilities refilled with potable water as necessary and kept clean and sanitary; and the prevention of any unsanitary conditions through waste disposal.
- Informing field workers where water and hand washing/toilet facilities are located and then allowing reasonable time during their work shift to use them.

Following the requirements of the standard can result in a reduction in the number of workers who become ill from urinary infections, heat stress and skin disease, and reduce the worker exposure to pesticides and fertilizers. □

## October is National Ergonomics Month

October has been designated *National Ergonomics Month (NEM)* by the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (HFES) with the goal of raising awareness about the principles and benefits of applied ergonomics. Simply put, ergonomics is the science of making tools, tasks, products, environments, and systems safer and more comfortable for human use. The October campaign strives to educate the public about how to make the changes that can improve their safety, performance, and comfort.

State Fund encourages its insureds to participate in NEM. To get you started, we have developed a comprehensive ergonomics educational CD-ROM, *"Ergonomics: How May We Help You?"* available free of charge to State Fund policyholders. The CD has everything you need to get your ergonomics program started and maintained:

- General information
- Tools to identify risk factors
- Training material
- Steps to develop a written program
- Cost benefits of an ergonomics program
- Effective medical management

To get your copy of the CD and find out what other safety information is available to you (such as ErgoMatters® and bilingual Safety Meeting Topics) visit [www.scif.com](http://www.scif.com) or contact the Loss Control Department of your local State Fund office. □

### Continued from previous page

the ladder and use both hands to hold the side rails, not the rungs. Workers who pick fruit should stay below the top two ladder rungs.

When harvesting, start from the top of the tree and avoid overfilling the produce bucket or bag. Workers should reach only an arms' distance from the ladder; the combined weight of the worker plus the fruit bag or bucket can pull a worker off balance and cause a fall. Workers should never "jump" a ladder to move it. Rather, they should climb down



off the ladder to move it each time they need to reach a new work area. It's better to move twice than fall once.

The first step in fall prevention is to raise worker awareness of ladder hazards through training. Then, it's the workers' responsibility to keep themselves safe from falls. They are responsible for attending all fall prevention training and for following all recommended safety procedures. □

## Protéjase la espalda

**A**unque levantar repetidamente materiales pesados es la principal causa de lesiones a la espalda, una lesión puede ser resultado de tareas simples si se hacen en posiciones incómodas. Piense sobre cómo trabaja y muévase correctamente para protegerse la espalda. Así podrá trabajar más tiempo y con más confort.

Colóquese lo más cerca posible al trabajo.

Tendrá menos tensión en la espalda si el trabajo se encuentra entre los hombros y las rodillas, siendo el nivel de la cintura el más confortable. Puede que usted necesite subir o bajar la posición de su cuerpo con un banco o escalerilla para tener una mejor posición. Evite alcanzar demasiado lejos y cuando tenga que alcanzar hacia el suelo, coloque una mano sobre el muslo para ayudar a soportarse la espalda.

Usted puede lastimarse la espalda si trabaja en una posición difícil o torcida, o si dobla la espalda y la usa para levantar objetos pesados en vez de usar los músculos de las piernas. Doble las rodillas y haga cuclillas para acercarse al trabajo si éste le queda debajo de la cintura. Si necesita estar en cuclillas por un tiempo prolongado, alterne estar arrodillado sobre una rodilla para transferir el peso de las piernas y de la espalda, o siéntese sobre un banco o una caja.

Antes de levantar un objeto, considere su peso, tamaño y forma. Colóquese de cara al objeto y cerca del mismo. Doble las rodillas y sujete el objeto con toda la mano. Meta los brazos con los codos a la cintura mientras mantiene el peso del cuerpo centrado y la espalda recta. Meta el mentón para enderezar la espalda y el cuello. Levante el objeto con las piernas en un movimiento continuo y suave; evite movimientos súbitos



o torcer la espalda. Si es necesario levantar el objeto por encima del nivel de la cintura, cambie cómo sujeta el objeto para mantener el peso centrado. Para bajar el objeto, invierta el proceso. Si no está seguro de poder manejar el peso por sí solo, busque ayuda de otro

trabajador o use un dispositivo mecánico. Pero recuerde que los equipos pueden causarle tensión en el cuerpo si los empuja o tira de ellos incorrectamente.

Un exceso de esfuerzo, lesiones previas, mala postura, exceso de peso, falta de ejercicio, músculos débiles en el abdomen y edad avanzada pueden aumentar las probabilidades de lesiones a la espalda. Por esas razones, debe mantenerse en buenas condiciones físicas. Descanse lo suficiente, aliméntese saludablemente, beba suficiente agua y haga ejercicios de calentamiento antes de su trabajo.

### REVISIÓN DEL TEMA

Instructor \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

Ubicación \_\_\_\_\_

Asistente(s) \_\_\_\_\_

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#### Recomendaciones de seguridad

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