



# Safety News

ISSUE THREE, 2008

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

## An Ounce Of Prevention...

**S**trains and sprains account for a majority of workplace injuries and lost work time. The injuries are often caused by lifting, pushing or overreaching and usually affect the back, shoulders, and arms.

Preventing strain and sprain injuries are a lot easier than correcting them.

Strain increases in proportion to the distance of the work from your body.

There's less strain on your body if the work is positioned between your shoulders and knees, with a waist-high level being the most neutral and comfortable.

So, try to work with your arms below your shoulder level and stay as close to the work area as possible. You may need to raise or lower yourself with a stool or ladder for better positioning. When reaching down, put one hand on your thigh to support your back.

Strains and sprains can occur from activities performed in awkward positions or when bending over and relying on your back for support rather than your leg muscles. When performing activities below your waist, bend your knees and squat down to position yourself closer to the work. If the task requires you to maintain a

squatting position for a while, alternate kneeling down on one knee to transfer the load off your legs and back, or use a stool to sit on.

Sometimes equipment can put more strain on

your body if you push or pull it incorrectly. If given the choice, push rather than pull a load. But, in both cases, get as close to the load as possible. When pushing a load, use both hands and arms keeping them in close to your body; keep your back straight and lean into the load; then, use your whole body weight and leg muscles to walk the



load as you push. If you must pull a load, use both hands and arms; keep your back straight and lean away from the load; and again, use your whole body weight and leg muscles to walk the load as you pull.

Your body works best when it's used as it was designed. When you force your body to do things beyond its capability, you risk a strain or sprain injury. How can you prevent these injuries? The obvious thing is to keep yourself in good physical condition and work within your limits. □

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## The Expert's Corner

# Smoke From Wildfires And The Workplace

**W**hen smoke from wildfires is in the air, employers may wonder if the smoke is a health hazard and if they can do anything to protect their workers.

Smoke is a complex mixture of gases and fine particles. These fine particles are the primary health concern, but chemicals in the mixture can also contribute to the irritating effects of smoke. Carbon monoxide in the smoke is typically only a concern for firefighters close to the fire line.

Health effects depend upon the level of smoke and the sensitivity of the individual. They can include irritation of the eyes and respiratory tract, cough, phlegm, wheezing, difficulty in breathing, and chest discomfort. People with asthma, lung disease, or heart disease are more likely to be affected by smoke. If workers experience symptoms such as chest pain, chest tightness, shortness of breath, or severe fatigue, medical attention should be sought.

Employers should stay alert. They should listen to local news, weather forecasts, and air quality alerts. Air quality advisories and

news can also be found at [www.airnow.gov](http://www.airnow.gov).

Staying indoors is a common advisory. The heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning (HVAC) system should be set to maximize the amount of recirculated air and minimize any fresh air being brought in. Portable room air cleaners can provide additional air



filtration. Some buildings are so “leaky” that the inside air is no better than the outside air. Other buildings may lack air conditioning and become too hot with all the windows and doors kept shut. If the inside environment is unacceptable, it may be appropriate for some or all employees to remain at home or at some alternate location.

Reducing physical activity may be recommended. Employers should review the level of physical exertion needed for all operations and limit or stop some activities if appropriate.

Air contaminants generated within the workplace can be a concern. If open doors and windows or mechanical ventilation with make-up air from outside are needed to reduce exposure to air contaminants from forklifts, welding, or other processes, it may be appropriate to limit or even stop some operations.

In general, the use of respirators or masks is not recommended for widespread use in areas affected by smoke. However, their use may be appropriate for some workers, such as those who need to be outdoors. Consult a safety and health professional before providing respirators for your employees. □

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## Guard Against Bloodborne Pathogens

**B**loodborne pathogens (BBP) are microorganisms that can cause disease when transferred from one person to another through infected blood or other body fluids. The most common diseases spread in this manner are Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV); others include malaria, Hepatitis C and syphilis.

In 1991, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) began requiring employers with workers potentially exposed

to blood or other infectious materials to establish a Bloodborne Pathogens Program. The purpose of a BBP program is to protect employees from the health hazards associated with BBPs and to provide appropriate treatment and counseling should an employee be exposed to BBPs.

Exposure to BBPs can occur in different ways such as through an opening or break in the skin from a scrape, cut, rash, burn or other minor injury where infected blood or fluids

can enter the body. Mucous membranes of the eyes, nose and mouth are also avenues for diseases to enter. Workers in health care and public safety jobs could potentially be exposed to BBPs with needlestick injuries. Non-health care workers could become exposed at work while providing help to an injured co-worker and coming in contact with the injured person's blood or body fluids.

One means of protection against BBP expo-

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# Workplace Spills

**S**pills in the workplace cause hazards such as slips and falls, exposure to the spilled material, and accidental release into the environment. Find out about the proper storage, handling, use, and spill response for the materials in your workplace.

Get training on your worksite spill response plan and the materials that you use and store. Read the material safety data sheets (MSDS) that explain correct spill response techniques, cleanup methods, and disposal. Know when it is safe for you to clean up a spill yourself and when to call your supervisor, the company spill response team, or an outside resource for assistance. Know what equipment you will need to clean-up properly. Use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) for spill response such as gloves, safety glasses, coveralls, and/or respirators. Know where your spill response materials are located at work and how to use them.

Limit the amounts of new and hazardous materials



stored on your site to minimize the risk and size of spills. Place materials out of the lane of foot and vehicle traffic to prevent accidental spills. Store materials indoors and away from exterior doors and sewer drains to prevent accidental releases to the environment. Consider double containers for materials stored in large quantities, that may create a difficult cleanup task, or that can be toxic or hazardous even if spilled in small amounts.

If you cause a spill or find a spill, immediately notify your supervisor and coworkers in the area. If the spilled material is flammable or volatile, shut off flame sources and air the area out if it is safe to do so. If possible, protect floor drains or outside access areas from the spill. Cordon off the spill area to prevent further access and potential exposures. If you or a coworker was exposed to the spilled material, use emergency eye washes or showers for at least 15 minutes, get to a well-ventilated area, and seek medical attention, if needed. □

If workers have come in contact with blood or other potentially infectious bodily fluids, they've been involved in an exposure incident. They should be advised to stay calm, wash themselves thoroughly, and report the incident to their supervisor as soon as possible. They should inform their supervisor of how, when, where, and whose blood they came in contact with, and should seek medical attention immediately. A medical professional will provide them with appropriate testing, treatment and education.

For more detailed BBP information and updates, visit the website maintained by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration at <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/bloodborne pathogens/>. □

# Sun Safety Tips

The sun's rays can cause serious skin problems when exposure is excessive. Besides sunburn, there are various types of skin cancer including deadly melanomas. When working outdoors, the best skin protection against the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays is to wear a long sleeved shirt, long pants, a neck scarf, and your hard hat.

For exposed skin, sunscreens help protect against the cancer-causing UV rays. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends that the sunscreen be reapplied regularly – at least every two hours – especially when there's heavy sweating. Although, a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 is a general recommendation, the Academy suggests using the strongest sunscreen for a person's particular skin type with higher numbers for very fair-skinned people. Having tanned or naturally dark skin does not eliminate the need for protection against UV rays.

Your eyes should be shaded from the sun with sunglasses, visors, caps, or a combination of these. Shading your eyes not only protects them from damaging UV rays but it also keeps you from squinting. Squinting lessens your field of vision and diminishes your ability to safely see what you're doing and spot potential hazards. □

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sure is to practice "universal precautions." These are precautionary measures that assume all body fluids are infected with BBPs. They include:

- Using personal protective equipment (PPE) like gloves, lab coats, eye goggles, face shields, etc. at all times to prevent skin or mucous membrane contact with bodily fluids. Inspect all PPE for cracks, holes or other damage and never use damaged PPE.
- Washing hands or other skin surfaces thoroughly and immediately, if contaminated.
- Having a puncture resistant container to be used for storage and disposal after use, and when using sharp items (scalpels, needles, pipettes, etc.) that may be potentially contaminated.

# Safety Topic



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State Compensation Insurance Fund

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## Wash Your Hands

**W**e assume everyone knows how to wash their hands, but many people don't realize the importance of handwashing. Healthcare specialists generally cite handwashing as the single most effective way to prevent the transmission of disease. The spread of colds, the flu, and some pretty serious diseases like hepatitis A, meningitis, infectious diarrhea, lead exposure or other communicable diseases can be prevented if people make it a habit of frequently washing their hands.

When should you wash your hands? You should wash your hands often throughout the day, whether or not they appear to be dirty. You should wash your hands before you prepare or eat food, smoke, treat a sick or injured person, and before you do any other kind of activity that involves putting your fingers in or near your mouth, nose or eyes. You should also wash your hands after you go to the bathroom, after you blow your nose or change a diaper; after you've handled uncooked food, garbage, an animal or animal waste; or if you've come into contact with someone who's sick or injured.

How you wash your hands is just as important as when you wash them. Just rinsing them quickly is not enough. For a proper cleaning, you should rub your hands together for at least 10 to 15 seconds with soap then rinse with warm,

running water. Remember to wash your whole hand including your fingers, wrists, palms, the back of the hand, and under your fingernails. Pre-moistened towelettes are not a substitute for proper handwashing.



Your employer should let you know where the handwashing facilities and supplies are located, and allow you reasonable time during your work shift to use them. Inform your supervisor if a facility needs cleaning or supplies.

You can't see or smell most harmful germs and contaminants which may be on your hands. Regularly washing your hands during the day is easy and it can greatly reduce your chance of becoming ill or spreading contaminants and disease to others including your family members.

### TOPIC REVIEW

Instructor \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Attended By

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Safety Recommendations

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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 Public Agencies

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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 Public Agencies 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.

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