



Safety News

ISSUE THREE, 2007

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

“Tight Building” Syndrome

Energy efficient buildings normally have few health hazards. But, when workers in these buildings start voicing health complaints such as eye, nose and throat irritation, headache, fatigue, sneezing, odors, and complaints that work areas are “too hot” or “too cold,” management should take notice and take steps to investigate and correct the problem. The problem may be “tight building” or “sick building syndrome.”

Health problems may result from the polluted air being recycled within the building. The inside air could have been contaminated by emissions from work processes or vehicles outside of the building. Or, the air contamination could have come from products contained within the building such as new furniture, carpeting, adhesives, paneling, copy machines, janitorial supplies, carpet shampoos or insecticides. These can all contribute to indoor air pollution.

One way to determine the source of the problem is to have employees complete questionnaires describing their symptoms and complaints. They should include when and where their problems occur. Walk-through the workplace noting the number and location of affected workers and the frequency of complaints. What are sources of chemicals in the office (carpets, drapes, furniture,

equipment)? If furnishings were recently cleaned, what cleaners were used? What pesticides or other chemical-containing products are being used? Are there outside sources of pollution from car exhausts or parking garages that could enter the ventilation system? Where are heating and air



conditioning system air intakes located? Is the air conditioning system operating according to design specifications? How much outdoor air is being brought into the building? Does this meet the building’s designed rates and the ASHREA (American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning

Engineers) recommendations for this type of building? What kind of filtering system is there? Where is it located? What’s the frequency or type of maintenance service? Are records kept of the maintenance performed, with dates of service?

“Cures” for a sick building are as many as the causes and complaints. Increasing outside air circulation, or regular cleaning of the automatic heating and air conditioning systems may solve the problem. Sometimes measuring or sampling of specific contaminants may be necessary. Temperature and humidity measurements may also be needed. Often a combination of actions is necessary to solve the problem. □

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The Expert's Corner

Pandemic Flu, Earthquakes, And Other Disasters – Do You Have A Plan?

How will pandemic flu affect your business operations? What about earthquakes, fire, floods, or terrorist attacks? Emergencies affect business and industry every year, costing both lives and money; however, by planning ahead, injuries and costs can be reduced and returning to “business as usual” can occur more quickly. Below is a systematic approach to developing an emergency management plan.

Establish a planning team. This team should be made up of a core group of active members that receives input from all functional areas, including upper management, labor, human resources, maintenance, sales, safety and health, and legal. Management can demonstrate the company’s commitment by heading the team with a chief executive or plant manager.

Create a list of potential emergencies. Rank them by probability and potential impact. Be sure to include emergencies that could occur both within your facility and in the surrounding community. Consider disasters that have occurred historically, have a higher likelihood due to geography, and those

that could result from human error. Then assess the impact that each emergency could have on personnel, property, and business operations.

Analyze capabilities. Determine what systems are already in place and what resources are currently available, both internally and externally, for responding to emergencies. Identify firefighting equipment and personnel, medical services, and employee support systems. In addition to reviewing internal policies and procedures, you should also meet with government agencies, local organizations, and utilities. Identify critical products, services, and operations in order to determine the need for backup systems. Finally, review all insurance policies to ensure sufficient coverage.

Develop the plan. As you put together the plan, set goals and priorities, establish a timeline, and assign tasks to each member of the planning team. The key elements of an emergency management plan include:

- Direction and control
- Communications

- Life safety
- Property protection
- Community outreach
- Recovery and restoration
- Administration and logistics

Implement the plan. Once the plan has final approval, it needs to be integrated into company operations. Make sure everyone is familiar with the plan, aware of their responsibilities, and receives adequate training. The plan also needs to be periodically evaluated and updated.

For additional resources on developing an emergency plan for your business, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/prepared/>. □

David Kernazitskas, MSPH, is an Associate Industrial Hygienist servicing State Fund’s Fresno and Stockton district offices.

Ensure Workers Are (Safely) Set Up

Ergonomics means fitting the workplace to the worker to prevent physical stress and injury. Because the design of workplace equipment is critical to a worker’s performance, a well-adjusted, comfortable workstation that matches the individual and the requirements of the job increases worker productivity and has the potential of lowering workers’ compensation costs by reducing injury claims.

Ergonomic improvements don’t have to be difficult or costly. Most of the time, inexpen-

sive, minor changes will increase a worker’s comfort. For computer work, several elements should be examined: the chair, keyboard, monitor, desk, and other tools such as the mouse, document holder, and lighting. Your chair height should be adjusted so that your feet rest comfortably flat on the floor or footrest, with your knees just slightly lower than the hips. The curve of the back of the chair should fit into your low back.

With your shoulders relaxed, the armrests should be slightly below your elbows, and

allow your arms to hang comfortably at your sides. You should be able to get your chair close enough to your keying, mousing, or writing surfaces without over-reaching or using awkward postures.

With your shoulders relaxed and your fingers slightly curved, the home row of the keyboard should be at the same height as your elbows or slightly below your elbows.

Continued on next page

Revive Your First Aid Program

What would happen today, if there was an accident at your workplace? Would employees and management know what to do? Would the injured person get the best possible care?

When an accident happens, a first aid program that meets the requirements of the law and is tailored to the type and size of the workplace can literally make the difference between life and death or between recovery and permanent disablement.

Employers should insure that all employees know where emergency information is posted at the work site. The emergency notice should state the phone numbers of the closest ambulance service, fire/rescue unit, police station, and hospital. The amount of time it takes to look up one of these important numbers can make a big difference to a seriously injured person. The location of first aid equipment and rescue equipment should also be posted prominently.

All work sites should have a person with first aid or

medical training readily available in case of an emergency. First aid equipment and supplies, including a variety of dressings and instruments, as well as an up-to-date first aid manual, should be stored where they can be reached quickly and easily in case of an accident. These supplies should be inspected frequently, making sure they are kept in sanitary and usable condition and re-stocked after use. Larger workplaces may need more than one fully equipped first aid kit.

In isolated work sites emergency supplies and an action plan are especially important. At least one person trained in emergency first aid should always be on site. If first aid is not given properly, it can sometimes hurt rather than help an injured or ill person, or even be harmful to the person giving the first aid. All workers should know who on site is trained to give first aid, where the emergency first aid equipment is located and what medical professional or medical facility should be contacted if a medical emergency should occur. □

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The mouse should be positioned close to the keyboard and on the same level. A keyboard tray, adjusted to compensate for a too-high desk, can be added to hold the keyboard and mouse.

The monitor should be at a comfortable distance for you to view the screen and the height should allow your head and neck to be in a relaxed neutral posture. The screen should also be free of any glare caused by overhead lighting or nearby windows.

Working documents should be off the flat work surface and in a desk top document holder set beside, and at the same height as, the monitor or on an inclined document holder set between the



keyboard and monitor.

With the ever increasing use of laptop computers consult our website for more details at <http://www.scif.com/safety/ergomatters/ErgoMatters.html>.

Workers can reduce the risk of injury by becoming aware of what they do, how they do it, and how long they do it. They should be reminded to periodically look away from the screen, blink frequently, take

quick breaks or get out of the chair and stretch to reduce static postures and eyestrain. Ergonomically-speaking, set workers up for comfort, not for injury. □

ErgoMatters®

How do you choose a headset or a new office chair? What are some of the ergonomic issues associated with Blackberry use or the construction industry? Where can I find a case study on a successful ergonomic intervention? For answers to these questions and many more, check out the new State Fund publications, *ErgoMatters®*.

This series of ergonomics information sheets is now available at <http://www.scif.com>. Just click on the link for "A Total Resource for Ergonomics" or click the Better Ergonomics link under the Employers tab. You can also access them directly here: <http://www.scif.com/safety/ergomatters/ErgoMatters.html>

Developed by the in-house ergonomics specialists at State Fund, *ErgoMatters®* offer up-to-date information on a wide range of industries, topics and ergonomic issues.

These short information sheets can be used for training employees, as a topic for a safety meeting or to increase the knowledge of the safety and health experts in your company.

From libraries to laptops, conveyors to cosmetology, whole body vibration to wrist splints, these *ErgoMatters®* can help you find the information you are looking for. □

Safety Topic

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Material Handling

A large percentage of work production involves handling materials of one kind or another. Even with all our modern equipment and mechanized operations, it's often still necessary to manually handle parts and materials, either during the work process or during cleanup. As a result, material handling accounts for many accidents and injuries on the job. You can keep these accidents and injuries to a minimum if you take a second to think about controlling the materials at hand.

In the course of material handling, as you move it from one place to another, you want to make sure that you have the material under your control. If you're impatient and start tossing materials rather than properly placing them, you could end up injuring yourself or other workers.

Although it may be tempting to easily toss materials from one place to another, instead of walking a few steps to set it down where it belongs, you're risking not only damage to the material, but you're risking injury to yourself or others. If you hurriedly toss materials into a trash bin

from a distance instead of walking over to the bin and carefully putting the scraps into it, the material could hit the container and ricochet back at you causing a serious cut or puncture injury. A carelessly tossed item can miss its intended mark and break or shatter. Those shattered airborne particles can fly into your eyes or those of a bystander causing painful,



sometimes permanent damage to vision. If the tossed item contains a liquid, it could spill and cause someone to slip and fall. If the liquid is a chemical, it could splash and burn you or someone nearby.

When handling any material on the job, your first thought should be to keep that material under your control. There's a saying that "Your future can change in just one second." Take a second to think about the material you're handling then take those extra seconds to control and place that material; your future safety and that of your coworkers could be in your hands.

TOPIC REVIEW

Instructor _____

Date _____

Location _____

Attended By _____

Safety Recommendations



Safety News

News about Occupational Safety and Health in
State Contract Agencies

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Please forward to the person responsible for your safety program

News about Occupational Safety and Health in State Contract 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 and click on Seminars. □

Reporting Work-Related Injuries

State Fund's Claims Reporting Center (1-866-794-2510) 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 State Contract 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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