Enhance Safety for Your Older Employees

When you look across your workforce, do you think it's aging? If so, you're not alone. The Bureau of Labor Statistics tells us one in four workers in 2020 will be age 55 or older. That's well more than the one in 10 workers in 1990.[1]

Employees over the age of 55 experience arthritis and hypertension, affecting 47% and 44% of these workers, respectively.[2] An even greater percentage — more than 75% — live with at least one chronic health condition.[3]

"Looking at workplace injuries, slips, trips and falls become the most common incidents for employees over 50 years old," said Pinnacol Safety Services Consultant Jon VonderHaar. "As we age, we lose overall strength, balance and reaction time. And some of us have compromised vision, even with corrective lenses."

When older workers injure themselves, they take longer to recover, added VonderHaar, which means more lost time and higher medical costs. But the news isn't all bad. VonderHaar noted that older employees experience fewer and generally less severe injuries. And some simple changes to the workplace can reduce the frequency of these injuries.

Tips for safety and aging
Here are some tips for safety and aging workers, aggregated from sources such as the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health:

- *Match tasks to abilities.* Assign tasks suited to physical limitations.
- *Manage hazards.* A noisy workspace may impair older workers' ability to hear coworkers. Pinnacol's industrial hygienists can help your organization identify dangerous noise levels and implement solutions. Also, maintain level, dry flooring and well-lit halls and stairways to reduce slips, trips and falls.
- *Improve ergonomics.* Consider better lighting, less screen glare and both seated and mobile workstation options. Pinnacol's ergonomists help employers identify risk factors and design workspaces that reduce employees' musculoskeletal disorders and claim costs.
- *Train workers.* Old and young employees can learn from one another during classroom and online instruction. Aging workers can be invaluable mentors, for example, while the young can impart skills in new technologies. Managers can be trained on age-specific considerations and best practices in managing age-diverse teams.
- *Promote wellness.* Incentivized worksite wellness programs can slow the onset of health risks for both younger and older workers.
- *Pursue reasonable accommodation.* Employers can manage expectations for recovery, return to work and modified duties for older injured workers. Pinnacol's return to work consultants are available to help with individual claims and with an overall program.

“Changes and accommodations for older employees benefit all employees,” said VonderHaar. “Dr. Bernard Isaacs, a gerontologist at the University of Birmingham in the U.K., said it best: ‘Design for the young and you exclude the old. Design for the old and you include the young.’”

Pinnacol and other resources

Pinnacol’s safety consultants can help you find opportunities to accommodate your older employees and even enhance productivity — all at no cost to your organization. We invite you and your team to contact Pinnacol’s Safety On Call service at safetyoncall@pinnacol.com or 303-361-4700 or 888-501-4752.

Footnotes:

- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019.
- “Productive Aging and Work,” National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health,
- https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/productiveaging/safetyandhealth.html, 2015.
- Ibid.