Pinnacol Pointers
for Safety Group Programs

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Safe Lifting: Got Your Employee's Back?

In 2013, overexertion injuries from lifting, carrying, pushing and pulling materials accounted for $15 billion in workers' compensation costs nationally, or 25 percent of all claims costs. Only the common cold accounts for more lost days of work.

Claims involving lifting are the most common strain-related injury that Pinnacol sees. From 2011 to 2015, strain claims from lifting accounted for 32 percent of all strains, with an average annual cost of almost $31 million. The average cost of a low back injury claim is $10,745. And the indirect costs to the policyholder (e.g., loss of productivity, overtime costs and rehiring and training costs) can be much greater — two to four times the direct cost of the claim. The following controls can help curb back and shoulder injuries at your workplace:

Engineering controls — Change or modify tools, equipment or machinery to reduce the physical demands of the job. Use assistive devices (e.g., crane, forklift, conveyor) to handle materials.

Work practice controls — Change the way job tasks are performed to reduce the frequency and duration of risk exposure. For example, reorganize the order of job tasks to allow muscle recovery between tasks that require excessive force.

Administrative controls — These include job rotation, job enlargement, gradual introduction to work and pre-shift warm-up and stretching programs. Another administrative control is team lifting for certain heavy or awkward materials.

Training controls — Demonstrate these techniques when training employees on safe lifting:

- Get as close to the load as possible before lifting it, and keep the load close once you've lifted it. If possible, straddle the load or slide the load toward you before picking it up.
- Make sure your footing is secure. Do not lift objects that obscure vision and footing. Plan ahead, and make sure that your travel path is clear of obstructions and that there aren't slip hazards, such as a wet floor.
- Do not twist while lifting! Move your feet so they point in the direction of the lift as you turn. A good phrase to teach is, "keep the toes to the load." Lift smoothly and slowly, and do not jerk the load.

Pinnacol Resources
For more information on safe lifting in the workplace — including lifting procedures and a worksite poster — visit the lifting and ergonomics webpage at Pinnacol.com. Additional resources are available from the OSHA's ergonomics webpage and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). NIOSH and California OSHA also have an excellent booklet with guidelines on manual material handling. Or call Pinnacol's Safety On Call line at 303.361.4700 or 888.501.4752. Our safety services team stands ready to answer questions and help you take next steps toward safe lifting in the workplace.