

New York State Public Entities Safety Group 497

Safety Agenda

___ Chief, Fire Department
___ Site Administrators
___ Commissioners
___ Human Resources
___ Supt. Bldgs/Grounds
___ Elected Officials

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Firefighters are at Increased Risk for Cancer

Research conducted by the University of Cincinnati has found that firefighters are twice as likely to develop testicular cancer and have significantly higher rates of lymphoma and prostate cancer as non-firefighters. The research project also confirmed earlier findings that firefighters are at greater risk for multiple myeloma.

Firefighters are exposed to many carcinogens including benzene, diesel engine exhaust, chloroform, soot, styrene and formaldehyde. They can be inhaled or absorbed through the skin and occur both at the scene of a fire, in the firehouse, or anywhere that diesel trucks are idling.

The researchers are convinced that there is a direct correlation between the chemical exposures and firefighters' increased risk for cancer.

The researchers recommend that additional protective equipment be developed to help firefighters avoid inhalation and skin exposures to carcinogens.

“Firefighters should meticulously wash their entire body to remove soot and other residues from fires to avoid skin exposure.”

And, of course, it would be wise to be sure to wear personal protective gear at all fire scenes, and avoid idling of trucks as much as possible.

The research was supported in part by a grant from the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation, and reported in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine.

Tips for Safety Committee Effectiveness

1. Set clear expectations and goals
2. Have an agenda for every meeting
3. Measure the committee's progress
4. Be proactive. Be passionate about safety and the role of the committee members
5. Encourage communication among committee members
6. Give them time for their duties
7. Assign action items and do a follow-up
8. Prohibit non-safety related issues during meetings
9. Train committee members in techniques for running meetings
10. Train committee members in accident investigation, prevention, OSHA requirements and other standards
11. Recognize the committee's accomplishments.

Introducing Desiree Valentino

Hi, I'm Desiree Valentino and I've just assumed the honor of following Mary Hamilton as Claims Specialist for the Safety Group 497 program. I have 8 years experience in the insurance industry. Please call me at 1-888-855-4782, ext. 6911 or e-mail me at dvalentino@professionalunderwriters.com for claim issues.

Visit our Website at www.nysgroup497.com

Group Manager: Professional Underwriters – 1-800-833-8822, ext. 119

The Hidden Costs of Obese Workers

Obesity is costing the private insurer many more billions of dollars today and those costs are being passed on to employers thru higher premiums and additional coverage restrictions, according to a study, “The Rising Prevalence of Treated Diseases: Effects on Private Health Insurance Spending.” (K. Thorpe et al in Health Affairs, June 2005.) According to the study, in 2002 obesity cost the insurer \$36 billion compared with \$3.6 billion in 1987. The obese individual costs 56 percent more than the normal weight individual, compared to 2 percent more in 1987.

Obese individuals have significantly higher incidences of asthma, back problems, high blood pressure, diabetes and other diseases. They are also more likely to be absent more and incur a greater chance of injury.

General Motors stated in 2005 that an obese employee cost the company about \$1,500 more in health services annually. Since 26 percent of its active workers and dependents were obese, it was costing the company nearly \$1.4 billion in additional health care costs each year, and costs per individual continue to rise.

The picture of worker health is getting worse, according to corporate wellness expert Tom Gilliam. He finds the change in body mass index (BMI) dramatically changing. In 2000, 30 percent of applicants for jobs were obese. At the end of 2005, 38 percent of new hires in the workplace were obese. He predicts that 45 percent of the incoming work force will be obese by 2010.

Gilliam points out that people ignore their gradual weight gain. Gaining 3 pounds a year beginning in early adulthood results by middle age in a person being 60 pounds overweight.

What Can You Do About It?

In their book, “Move it, Lose It, Live Healthy: Achieve a Healthier Workplace One Employee at a Time”, Gilliam and his co-author Jan Neill take the approach that knowledge is power when it comes to taking weight off and keeping it off. They advocate gradual change and suggest that there are things employers and employees can do:

- Be honest with people about the excess weight and the illnesses that come with it
- Teach employees the basics of weight loss. The only way is to have a moderate, nutritious diet and exercise regularly. Fad diets, gadgets and other get-thin-quick schemes don't work.
- Get your employees excited about good nutrition. Encourage healthy recipe sharing, sharing of fresh fruits, veggie trays or other low-fat snacks. Remove the junk food in vending machines.
- Foster and encourage exercise groups. (Have participants sign a waiver so you do not incur liability.)
- Link weight loss to larger family issues like what they are doing to enable obesity in their children. Help employees set a good example for their children.

Organizational weight loss programs are successful only when there is top management support in terms of finance and time, according to Gilliam.

More than ever before, there is ample justification for employers to foster wellness programs. It is a matter of organizational as well as human costs. You can learn more about Gilliam's work at his web site, www.healthybodyweight.com, as well as a number of other web sites on obesity and wellness.