

Dispelling the “No Work-Related Injuries” Myth

You think your company is having a great year...low injury rate, low medical expenses, etc? Then, without warning, you have four reported OSHA recordable injuries in one day. What you will probably find is that these injuries come from employees who have, actually, been experiencing pain for months. Maybe the injury is now affecting their sleep patterns, or maybe it's taking a toll on their personal lives, either way, they just can't deal with the pain any longer and are forced to report it. This scenario is not uncommon for companies, especially in the current economic climate.

Upon review, these companies agonize over what they might have done differently, and expend unnecessary time and resources finger pointing and trying to determine where to place the “blame”. Why did the employees wait so long? Don't they know they are supposed to report early? Isn't it written in the handbook? Meanwhile, the root cause of the problem is neglected, and the symptoms continue.

Advanced Worksite Solutions (AWS) has a better option!

Case study: EHOB Manufacturing

EHOB is a small medical manufacturing company in Indianapolis, Indiana. ACE was recommended to the management at EHOB by their worker's compensation carrier to analyze work-related injury risk in their facility. Both ACE, and the worker's compensation carrier, felt there were simple improvements that could be made within the facility to reduce work-related injury risk. Despite hesitations about investing in “unnecessary” safety improvements (thanks to the “no work related injuries” myth), EHOB agreed to deploy an injury risk management program, over a three month probationary period.

The On-site Injury Prevention program launched in January of 2009. The assignment was to:

1. Generate ADA compliant Functional Job Descriptions (FJDs) for each position
2. Observe employee work habits and provide job coaching and ergonomic improvement ideas for injury prevention.
3. Assess any complaints of discomfort from employees and, either treat within OSHA compliant First-Aid guidelines, or refer accordingly to prevent a minor injury from becoming a major problem (expense).

The program was introduced at a staff meeting, and the Injury Triage Specialist was scheduled for the first visit a week later. The company opted to allow employees to report both work and non-work related discomfort concerns to the Injury Triage Specialist. Employees were provided a centralized sign-up sheet for referrals whenever the specialist was not on-site. Within two shifts, 10 employees sought care from the specialist. . EHOB was shocked to discover that this was only the tip of the iceberg. By the end of the month, the specialist had seen more than 20 different cases of work-related and non work-related discomfort complaints.

An analysis of the first month's cases revealed that the majority of the complaints were Musculoskeletal Disorders (sprains and strains). Eighteen of the cases could be considered work-related; the other two were not related to work. Of the eighteen possibly work related, only one was referred to Occupational Medicine. All other complaints were effectively managed by the Injury Triage Specialist within the guidelines of OSHA's First Aid policy, and through job coaching. This means that only one became a recordable injury. Seventeen, potential, reportable injuries were avoided using the on-site injury management program in the first month.

Recent data suggests that the average workers' compensation claim, conservatively, costs the employer \$18,000 in both direct and indirect costs. In EHOB's case, the 17 avoided work related claims could have cost the company more than \$306,000. While not all injuries would have been reported immediately, it is very likely that they would have been reported at some point during the year. The longer sprains and strains are go

untreated, the more serious they become, often resulting in expensive diagnostics, physical therapy, or more likely – surgery. At the end of the probationary period, the volume of reported injuries has decreased (as anticipated). And, after the initial wake-up call, EHOB fully understood the value of early intervention and/or early reporting. In addition to the early intervention triage services, the company now has several ADA compliant Functional Job Descriptions, posters to encourage safe work postures, and a new partner to enhance established safety programs.

Utilization of a qualified injury risk management specialist, can positively impact an organizations bottom line. If less workers' compensation claims, increased production and an improved bottom line are important in your organization, please contact us at 317-390-5590.