

## **New Employees Account for Large Share of Workplace Injuries**

A significant share of overall workplace injuries occur during new employees' first year on the job, according to a recent study.

The report by Travelers Cos., Inc. found that over a five-year period, injuries to new employees accounted for 35% of all workplace injuries. These injuries resulted in more than 6 million lost workdays, accounting for 37% of all lost workdays during the period.

First-year injuries were especially prevalent in four industries. They comprised:

- 53% of claims and 47% of claim costs in restaurants,
- 48% of claims and 52% of claim costs in construction,
- 43% of claims and 38% of claim costs in services, and
- 39% of claims and 41% of claim costs in transportation.

The most frequent causes of injuries to new employees were:

- Overexertion (27%)
- Slips, trips and falls (22%)
- Struck by an object (14%)
- Cuts and punctures (6%)
- Caught in or between objects (6%)
- Motor vehicle accidents (6%)

Thirty-eight percent of first-year injuries were strains and sprains resulting from those overexertion and tripping accidents. Fractures accounted for 13%, some 9% were contusions, with cuts and puncture wounds, inflammation and dislocations making up 6% each.

Severe injuries such as amputations and multiple traumas were rare but costly — they comprised 8% of total claims, but 26% of total claim costs.

Employers should not assume that experienced new hires will be less likely to get hurt than those who are inexperienced. An experienced new worker may not necessarily understand their employer's expectations for safe practices.

### **What you can do**

Fortunately, there are steps employers can take to prevent their newest employees from getting hurt while at work and minimize lost time from accidents. These include:

- Having a formal hiring process and clear job descriptions that emphasize the workplace safety culture.
- Using behavioral interviews and background checks to determine whether prospective employees will fit within the employer's safety culture.
- Analyzing each step in performing a particular job to identify the associated safety hazards, and ways to reduce or eliminate them.
- Including safety information in new employee orientation.
- Continuously training employees on safe practices.
- Including skill-based training (procedures on how to safely perform a task) and awareness-based training (training on general workplace policies, identification of workplace hazards, and employer safety expectations) in the ongoing training programs.
- Implementing health and wellness programs, such as weight loss, healthy eating and exercise programs.
- After accidents occur, analyzing them to determine their root causes. Document what happened, where, how long the employee had been with the company, and estimate how frequently the type of accident could recur if no changes are made.
- Implementing return-to-work programs so that injured workers can get back to work quickly, even if only in a reduced capacity.

Finding and hiring good employees is both difficult and expensive. The last thing you as an employer want is for a good new hire to get hurt and miss many days of work. It hurts productivity and morale, raises workers' compensation costs, and may discourage good employees from staying with you.

It is in the best interests of employers and employees to prevent workplace injuries to the extent possible. It is not necessary to just accept new employee vulnerability to injury. Accidents can be prevented or made less likely.

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