

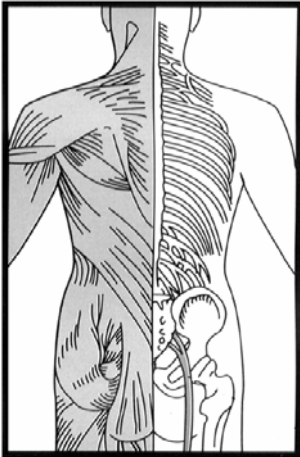
Michigan Municipal Workers' Compensation Fund Safety and Health Resource Manual

Back Injury Prevention Program

Hiring

To be successful, a complete program for preventing back injuries begins with the hiring process. Employers who address the issue of back safety during the hiring process send a clear message to candidates and new employees that back health and safety are important to the organization.

They also have greater assurance that they have correctly matched the employee to the job.



Employers can reduce the risk of on-the-job back injuries by assuring that the employees they hire can physically perform the job. Employers can successfully achieve this by

- properly analyzing positions in their job descriptions,
- considering the use of post job-offer physicals, and
- using pre-employment physicals for all employees who are at substantial risk of back injury from the essential functions their jobs require.

As with all aspects of employment, hiring employees requires that employers do not discriminate against candidates who may have pre-existing back conditions. Employers must comply with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act during hiring.

They should also implement reasonable accommodations for employees who are "otherwise qualified" to perform essential functions but may be at risk for back injury.

What Employers Should Do

Employers should develop accurate, detailed descriptions that provide the physical requirements of each job. These job descriptions are important to an effective hiring process and important for candidates who need precise information about the tasks a position for which they are applying may involve. The job description should reflect how employees actually perform the work and, therefore, employers should obtain information from employees who currently fill the position. The job description can then be useful for determining whether or not an employee has the physical capability to perform the essential functions of the job. A properly developed description also provides guidance on the type of training a newly hired employee needs to be successful in the position.

The first step in developing an accurate and effective job description is to identify and define the essential functions of the job. Most positions have functions that are essential and essentials that are marginal. To identify the essential functions, the employer should ask the following questions:

- Does the position exist to perform that function?
- How many other employees are available to perform the function?
- To how many other employees can the employer assign the function?
- What degree of knowledge, skill or expertise is necessary to perform the function?
- How much time is necessary to perform the function?
- What are the consequences of not requiring an employee to perform the function?
- How do the terms of any collective bargaining agreement affect a determination of essential functions?

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The job description should breakdown the responsibilities of the position into its individual tasks and responsibilities. Where appropriate, the employer should describe the physical demands of each task or responsibility. The description should specify:

- any amounts of weight an employee would have to lift,
- any amounts of time the employee would have to stand or sit for long periods of time, and
- any requirements for physical flexibility (Does the employee have to crawl, kneel, bend, reach?).

Employers should obtain information from existing employees who perform the work to develop the most accurate and objective description possible.

Pre-Employment Physicals

Once employers have job descriptions in place, they should analyze the physical requirements of each position and identify those positions that pose a high risk for back injury.

If an employer uses pre-employment physicals properly, these exams can be very useful to assuring the success of the back injury prevention program. Done incorrectly, the physical can result in costly litigation.

The examination should take place after the job offer and be job-related and consistent with the employers' business needs. Employers should not require pre-employment physicals for low risk positions because such examinations are not consistent with business requirements and increase the organization's exposure to lawsuits. Employers may make a job offer conditional on the results of the medical examination but only if all entering employees in similar jobs must take the physical.

Selecting a Physician

Employers should use the same physician or physicians from the same medical facility to conduct pre-employment physicals. This should help to assure consistency in the opinions related to job suitability.

Employers should communicate the importance of thorough physicals and of giving opinions that are consistent with the specific position for which an employee has applied. To assure accurate opinions, employers should provide the physician with the job description and, where appropriate, photographs of an employee actually performing essential functions.

Employment Inquiries

Employers must take care when asking questions of candidates for employment. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, it is illegal for employers to ask applicants about the existence, nature, or extent of a disability. However, the employer may and should review the physical requirements of positions with applicants and ask them about their ability to perform specific job functions.

Employers should limit their inquiries to physicians to questions about the candidate's ability to perform all of the functions as described in the job description without posing a significant threat to the health and safety of themselves or others. Employers should not ask physicians about candidates' disabilities. They can ask, however, the physician to indicate

- any physical restrictions that might limit a candidate's ability to perform essential job functions, and

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- to provide information on accommodations that the employer could implement that would allow the candidate to perform successfully in the position.

Reasonable Accommodations

If the physical identifies certain functions or tasks that the employee is physically unable to perform, the employer should first determine if these functions or tasks are "essential" according to the job description. If the function is not essential, the employer should remove it from the employee's job description.

If the task or function, however, is essential, the employer should consider making a reasonable accommodation that would allow the employee to perform the essential functions of the job within their physical restrictions. Reasonable accommodations may include:

- Adaptive devices or the modification of existing equipment,
- Job restructuring,
- Modified or part-time work schedules,
- Adjusting or modifying examinations, training materials and approaches, or policies,
- Reassigning the employee to a vacant position which he or she can perform,
- Providing readers or interpreters, and
- Making the workplace accessible to and useful by people with disabilities.

Employers should review their responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Michigan Handicappers Act when developing their pre-employment physical program.

Training

Employers should develop and clearly communicate the training policy for their program for back injury prevention. Without clearly stated management commitment to training, any program for back injury prevention will falter and may be ineffective in controlling losses.

The training an employer provides should be for everyone -- employees, management and supervisors. Managers and supervisors should receive the same training as employees. Because they are responsible for the performance of their employees, managers and supervisors should also receive training on how to conduct training themselves. Supervisors will, in particular, need skills as trainers since they are most likely to identify employees using improper lifting or material handling procedures. There is no better time to take corrective action through training than when a supervisor observes an employee whose performance is likely to cause him or her physical harm. To be effective in contributing to the program for back injury prevention, managers and supervisors need to be confident about their knowledge and their training skills.

Training Content

Employers should provide all their employees with training on all aspects of the back and back injury prevention. Training should cover the two broad areas of physiology and mechanics and include sessions on the following topics:

- Anatomy of the back
- Physiology of injuries
- Back maintenance, exercise, wellness
- Proper lifting techniques
- Ergonomics
- Equipment usage

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- Hazard identification

Scheduling of Training

Employers should begin training their employees before putting them on the job. Pre-placement training on back injury prevention should be mandatory and, at a minimum, should cover proper techniques for lifting and safe procedures for equipment usage. Current employees who change positions -- lateral move, promotion, or injury -- should receive "pre-placement" type training in areas specific to their new positions. The training sessions do not have to be long or formal. Even a ten-minute toolbox talk can be effective in communicating information and reinforcing safe habits.

After initial training, training should take place at regular intervals (monthly is preferable) until all employees have received training in all recommended areas. Thereafter, annual refresher training is necessary to keep skills and awareness high.

Employees who receive back injuries because of improper mechanics or equipment usage should attend training in those areas immediately upon their return to work from the back injury. If injured employees cannot identify why the injury occurred, they should attend additional training in hazard identification.

Training: A Supervisory Responsibility

Training can take many forms:

- Lectures
- Handouts
- Videos
- Hands-on training
- Slide presentations

To maintain interest, it is preferable to use a variety of approaches.

Supervisors can gather information from many sources, among them:

- The municipality's training director
- The local public or college library
- The municipality's designated medical clinic
- Michigan Municipal Workers' Compensation Fund
- The local health department
- The Internet

Supervisors should document all training provided, including topic covered, date of the sessions, name of the person conducting the training, and names of attendees.

Corrective Action

Assuring that employees comply with stated policies and procedures is essential to the success of the organization's program for back injury prevention. Employees must know that the organization will hold them accountable if they do not follow the policies and procedures communicated in employee manuals as well as during orientation and training.

Most employees will cooperate with efforts to assure their safety and health. However, there are employees who resist conforming as well employees who "forget" the rules in their haste to get

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the job done. In these cases, even periodic training will not be beneficial unless the employees receive discipline immediately when supervisors see them using improper techniques. The disciplined does not have to be "punitive" at least for the first infraction. Instead "on-the-spot" training can reinforce policies and procedures, communicate the employer's concern for the employee's well being, and the importance of each employee's contribution to reducing needless injury.

To emphasize the importance of corrective action, managers and supervisors need to take a leadership role by following safe procedures at all times and by requiring that safety be the first concerns on all situations.

Performance Reviews

Performance reviews provide another opportunity for reinforcing the importance of safety and of the program for back injury prevention. Employers should make safety habits and compliance with safety polices and procedures an element process of evaluating their employees' performance. They should also make managers' and supervisors' commitment and ability to promote the organization's safety program -- including back injury prevention -- an integral part of their job and of their performance review.

Hazard Recognition and Reduction

To correct a problem, you have to know it exists. That is the goal of hazard recognition: being able to recognize situations that put employees at risk of back injury.

Hazard recognition is the process of looking at the following:

- What is necessary to perform the job,
- Who does the job,
- What preparation the person receives to perform the job, and
- Tools that the person will use to the job.

Performing the Analysis

When employers prepare job descriptions, they should examine and observe each task that an employee performs. The observation should allow them to determine whether the procedure the individual is using presents a hazard. If it does, they need to evaluate the task and decide if alternative procedures can achieve the same goal without putting the individual at risk of back injury.

Evaluating the Need for Equipment

As employers analyze job procedures, they should also consider the use of equipment. Equipment falls into two broad categories:

1. Equipment that employees use to help them perform the work. For lifting or material handling tasks, for example, such equipment includes hand trucks, lift trucks, conveyors and pallet jacks.
2. Equipment that protects the employee while he or he is performing the work, such as back belts.

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When evaluating the effectiveness of equipment currently in use or the need for changes to existing equipment, employers should consider the following:

- Is there a piece of equipment that they could purchase that would help employees in performing the task and reducing the risk of back injury?
- Do employees know how to use existing equipment properly?
- Do they maintain equipment in proper working order?
- Can employees use personal protective equipment?
- Is the use of equipment mandatory?

Conducting Inspections

Supervisory inspections can be effective tools for assuring worker safety. Every organization should have a policy that communicates the importance of managers and supervisors conducting inspections of the work area, employees, and equipment. Daily inspections are essential. These inspections can be informal and still be effective. A simple walk-through that identifies scheduled work loads for employees and any unsafe working conditions (for example, wet floors) as well as an inspection of equipment to assure that it is in proper working order is all that is necessary. Employers may wish to document such inspections on a simple checklist.

Periodically, managers or supervisors should conduct more formal inspections. During such inspections, detailed observation of work habits and of the working environment should occur. In addition, supervisors should verify that employees know correct procedures. They should determine if employees are consistently checking equipment before using it and tagging equipment that requires service. Supervisors should make certain that employees understand stated policies and procedures. The formal inspection should provide time for the supervisor to obtain input from workers about conditions and about any ideas they may have to improve safety.

Investigating Near Misses and Accidents

When a “near miss” or an accident occurs, it is evidence that a hazard exists. Conducting a thorough investigation can help the employer to identify the hazards that contributed to the accident so that the employer can deal with them.

➤ **Supervisors should conduct and document all investigations.** <

Reviewing Loss Data

Another tool for identifying hazards is the thorough, periodic review of information related to the injuries that have already happened. Although hazard recognition before an event can occur is preferable, reviews of accident information after they occur can help to identify hazards that are not readily identifiable during inspections. In addition, reviews of loss information can help supervisors to obtain an overview of trends. For example, several accidents that seemed to be unrelated at the time they occurred may be attributable to the same hazard once the employer has analyzed and categorized loss data. Furthermore, such a review should help to underscore the fact that most accidents have multiple causes. For example, equipment failure may contribute to an accident but so may worker fatigue or the employee's failure to take the time to properly inspect the equipment before using it.

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Reducing Hazards

It is not enough to recognize the hazard. Employers need to develop a documented policy and procedure for addressing all recognized hazards. The procedure should:

- Assign responsibility for hazard recognition and elimination.
- Identify to whom employees should report hazards.
- Detail the procedure for identifying and correcting hazards.
- Indicate how the organization expects supervisors and managers to track and document hazard reduction efforts.

To reduce the causes of hazards or injuries, employers should consider the three traditional risk management alternatives:

1. **Engineer the risk out of the procedure.** Employers should determine if there is a safer way to perform the task or equipment that employees could use to perform the hazardous procedure.
2. **Reduce the risk.** Employers can reduce either the frequency or the severity of the risk. To reduce the frequency, employers should decide if it is necessary for employees to perform the task as frequently as they currently do it, or whether a large number of employees could share the task. Reducing the severity can be as simple as instituting rules to control behavior. For example, employers can mandate that employees make two trips to carry 25 pounds rather than one trip to carry a 50-pound load.
3. **Transfer the risk.** Sometime the most effective choice for reducing the risk is contract the work out to a company that specializes in the area. If the employer has a job requiring heavy lifting but does not have the resources to purchase the necessary equipment, the employer should consider contracting the work.

Maintaining the Program

Once the program for back injury prevention is in place, the employer should develop a means for assuring its continued effectiveness. For example, the employer should audit the program periodically to verify that all components are in place and active. Developing checklists that supervisors can use to document their efforts can be a useful tool and provide a means for management review.

As with any other loss control program, management must view the program for back injury prevention as an ongoing process that becomes an integral part of the organization's daily administration.

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**Ten Components of the
Back Injury Prevention Program**

- _____ Job descriptions include physical requirements.
- _____ Policy for pre-employment physicals in place.
- _____ Mandatory pre-job placement training.
- _____ Mandatory regularly scheduled training.
- _____ Working disciplinary policy for violations.
- _____ Completed and document job analyses of all "at risk" positions.
- _____ Mandatory regularly scheduled inspection.
- _____ Management actively and appropriately addresses hazards.
- _____ Mandatory investigations of all "near-miss" and actual accidents.
- _____ Audit system for the program for back injury prevention in place.

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**Back Injury Prevention Program - Essential Functions
Analysis**

Position Title: _____

Description of Function: _____

Purpose of Function: _____

Number of Employees Who Perform this Function: _____

Special Skills Necessary to Perform this Function: _____

Consequences if Function is not Performed: _____

Amount or Percentage of Time Spent Performing this Function _____

Does Collective Bargaining Require this Function? _____

Comments: _____

Analysis Conducted by:

Name	Title	Date
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

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**Back Injury Prevention Program
Job Description**

Position Title: _____ Date: _____

	Tasks Included	Essential	
		Yes	No
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			

Physical Requirements

	# of Times	Hrs/Shift	X/Shift	Other
Lift				
Carry				
Bend				
Squat				
Climb				

Physical Requirements of Essential Functions

	# of Times	Hrs/Shift	X/Shift	Other
Lift				
Carry				
Bend				
Squat				
Climb				

Training Requirements:

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**Back Injury Prevention Program
Job Analysis**

Position Title: _____

Date: _____

Task: _____

Activity	Physical Requirements	Tools & Equipment Used	Hazards	Safe Procedure	Training Indicated

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Back Injury Prevention Program Self-Inspection Checklist

Department: _____ Date: _____

Shift: _____

ITEM	YES	NO	COMMENTS
GENERAL SAFETY			
Employees briefed on safety policies?	_____	_____	_____
Safety meetings conducted?	_____	_____	_____
Safety rules enforced?	_____	_____	_____
WORK AREA			
Materials stored at proper height?	_____	_____	_____
Floors kept dry?	_____	_____	_____
Walkways free of obstacles?	_____	_____	_____
Proper desk/counter height maintained?	_____	_____	_____
Chairs ergonomically correct?	_____	_____	_____
TRAINING			
All employees receive monthly training?	_____	_____	_____
New and transferred employees receive training?	_____	_____	_____
Management and supervisory staff receive training?	_____	_____	_____
Injured employees receive additional training?	_____	_____	_____
PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)			
PPE provided?	_____	_____	_____
PPE used?	_____	_____	_____
PPE inspected monthly?	_____	_____	_____
Use of PPE mandatory?	_____	_____	_____
Use of PPE enforced?	_____	_____	_____
OTHER EQUIPMENT			
Necessary equipment available?	_____	_____	_____
Mechanical equipment inspected daily	_____	_____	_____