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STAT



Safety Talk and Tips

Eastern Region's Environmental Safety and Health Newsletter

Volume 2, Issue 4

December, 2006

Flu season has arrived

*Your Eastern Region
Environmental, Safety and
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What Is Influenza (also called Flu)?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and, at times, can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each fall.

Every year in the United States, on average:

- ◆ Five to twenty percent of the population gets the flu;
- ◆ More than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications, and;
- ◆ About 36,000 people die from the flu.

Some people, including the elderly, young children, and people with certain health conditions are at risk for serious flu complications.

Complications Of Flu and How It Spreads

Complications of flu can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. Flu viruses spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with it. Adults may be able to infect others a day before any symptoms appear and up to 5 days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick.

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccination!

Source: Center of Disease Control (CDC)



Symptoms of the Flu

- ◆ Fever (usually high)
- ◆ Headache
- ◆ Extreme tiredness
- ◆ Dry cough
- ◆ Sore throat
- ◆ Runny or stuffy nose
- ◆ Muscle aches
- ◆ Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

Lower Back Pain and Spinal Cord Injuries

Americans spend at least \$50 billion each year on low back pain, the most common cause of job-related disability and a leading contributor to missed work. Back pain is the second most common neurological ailment in the United States, only headache is more common.

What causes lower back pain?

As people age, bone strength and muscle elasticity and tone tend to decrease. The discs begin to lose fluid and flexibility, which decreases their ability to cushion the vertebrae. Pain can occur when someone lifts something too heavy or overstretches, causing a sprain, strain, or spasm in one of the muscles or ligaments of the back.



Who is most likely to develop low back pain?

Nearly everyone has low back pain sometime. Men and women are equally affected. It occurs most often between the ages of 30 to 50, due in part to the aging process. The risk of experiencing low back pain from disc disease or spinal degeneration increases with age.

What conditions are associated with low back pain?

- Bulging Disc (also called protruding, herniated, or ruptured disc) - Our discs are under constant pressure. As discs degenerate and weaken, cartilage can bulge or be pushed into the space containing the spinal cord or a nerve root, causing pain.
- Sciatica - a condition in which a herniated or ruptured disc presses on the sciatic nerve.
- Spinal stenosis - related to congenital narrowing of the bony canal.

How is back pain treated?

Treatment involves using analgesics, reducing inflammation, restoring proper function and strength to the back, and preventing recurrence of the injury. Compresses may help reduce pain and inflammation and allow greater mobility for some individuals.

Source: Stevens Publishing: Fact Sheet: Low Back Pain

What Is Spinal Cord Injury?

A spinal cord injury occurs when someone suffers a traumatic injury to the neck or back that causes so much damage to the spinal cord that some nerves can no longer send messages between the brain and other parts of the body.

Spinal cord injury may affect a person's ability to use their arms, legs, or other parts of their body. It may also cause difficulty breathing, and can affect sense of feeling or touch.

Did You Know...

- ◆ There are about 11,000 new cases of spinal cord injury reported in the United States each year—every 48 minutes a person sustains a spinal cord injury.
- ◆ The total number of people with spinal cord injuries in the United States is estimated to be over 250,000. Males are more likely to sustain a spinal injury, accounting for over 78 percent of reported injuries.
- ◆ Research shows that most people who suffer spinal cord injuries are between 16 and 30, but the average age at injury has been steadily rising.
- ◆ Motor vehicle accidents (47%) and falls (24%) account for most such injuries.

How to Protect Yourself

Buckle Up - Always wear your seat belt when traveling in an automobile. The US DOT estimates that the typical driver will be involved in an accident of some type on an average of every six years.

Wear Your Helmet - Always wear a helmet when riding a bicycle. Each year, over 500,000 people receive bicycle-related injuries.

Watch Your Step - Many spinal injuries occur from simple falls.

- ◆ Turn on more lights and make sure all passageways are well lit.
- ◆ When walking or running, always watch your step.
- ◆ Look for hazards such as wet floor or icy sidewalk.
- ◆ Use a steady step stool.
- ◆ Be sure the ground is solid and level for a ladder.
- ◆ Do not hide or tack down any power cords. Keep power cords out of traffic areas
- ◆ Have children put their toys away
- ◆ Avoid wearing socks, slippers or smooth-soled shoes in the home
- ◆ Place non-slip strips or decals in tub and showers

NOAA Tier I or Tier II— Are you ready for an Inspection?

Maybe your office has never had a Tier I or Tier II inspection by an NWS or NOAA representative. Someday your office will have an inspection, which is an important way to build an understanding of ES&H requirements, enhance your overall program, and maximize your safety and the safety of your entire office team.

Results of Tier I and Tier II inspections show some common themes for improvement:

Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) – make sure an MSDS is available for all office chemicals and cleaning products (some items purchased through GSA include the MSDS automatically), and if staff members bring in things on their own, like lotions and hand cleaners, chances are MSDSs will be required for them.



First Aid Kits – Check your first aid kits for missing or expired items. Many medicines and ointments lose their effectiveness over time.

Training Records – These need to be kept updated. Update them immediately after receiving training or with the addition of new staff members. Include the names of those who received the training and, obviously, the type of training they received.

Ergonomics – Has your office had an annual survey of ergonomic issues? Are changes or updates needed?

Medical Waste – How is your office's sharps program? Do you have a place where medical waste can be disposed of safely?

The Eastern Region quarterly ES&H report form and standard, monthly office inspection checklists remind us to check many of these items. Following the form and checklists will help your office's ES&H program and ensure fewer action items after an inspection. Don't ignore the checks, and assist your office's ES&H focal point(s) by allowing as much time as necessary and feasible to complete these and other important safety and environmental tasks. Remember, safety first!



Lesson Learned - Safety Around Electricity

A technician was working on the alignment of a NOAA Weather Radio. During the course of the work, his screwdriver accidentally brushed a tube with 2800 DC voltage, causing an electrical shock. Thankfully, the technician was not seriously injured. When your work duties require you to work on a system live, please remember the following:

1. 10 milliAmperes (mA) can cause a person not to release their grip and 30 mA can cause a stoppage of breathing
2. Prepare for the work by knowing where the hazards are before opening up the equipment
3. Use insulated tools when working on live electric
4. Use protective equipment that's right for the job
5. Make sure that the safety observer understands their role.

The Environmental Corner—Recycling



The Four Basic Recycling Principles

1. **REDUCE** the amount of trash discarded
2. **REUSE** containers and products
3. **RECYCLE** products and use recycled materials and compost
4. **RESPOND** to the solid waste dilemma by reconsidering waste producing activities and by expressing preferences for less waste

Source: EPA

RE-USE Part 2 of a 4 Part Series

REUSE to avoid too much trash:

- ◆ Consider reusable products.
- ◆ Maintain and repair durable products.
- ◆ Reuse bags, containers, and other items.
- ◆ Borrow, rent or share items used infrequently.
- ◆ Sell or donate goods instead of throwing them out.

Tips: Reducing Waste During The Holidays

- ◆ Turn off or unplug holiday lights during the day.
- ◆ If you host a party, set the table with cloth napkins and reusable dishes, glasses and silverware.
- ◆ After holiday festivities, put leftovers in recyclable containers, and share them with family, friends and others. Donate whole, untouched leftovers from parties to a local food bank or homeless shelter.
- ◆ Where possible, compost leftover food scraps, with leaves and grass clippings.

- ◆ Show your guests where to put recyclables such as aluminum, glass, and plastic beverage containers.
- ◆ After parties, fill your dishwasher to capacity before running it.
- ◆ Wash and reuse empty glass and plastic jars, milk jugs, coffee cans, dairy tubs. These containers can be used to store leftovers and other loose items.
- ◆ If going away from home for the holidays, to save energy, turn down your thermostat and put lights on timers.

These tips are from the EPA

REMEMBER, SAFETY FIRST!



About this Newsletter

This newsletter is brought to you on a quarterly basis by the Eastern Region Environmental Safety and Health Advisory Board to help increase awareness of the importance of the safety and health programs within the Department of Commerce, NOAA, and the National Weather Service. Your comments are welcome. Please send all comments to Kevin Murray.