

Propane Safety Meeting

Subject: Back Safety

OSHA places back injuries as the number one workplace safety problem. The Bureau of Labor Statistics says that more than one million workers suffer some type of back injury or illness each year. Twenty five percent of all worker compensation claims involve back injuries. The cost to industry is in the 10's of billions of dollars and that is on top of the suffering and pain that is experienced by the workers.

If back injuries are so common, what are the causes and what can be done to reduce their frequency and severity?

- **Lifting loads that are just too heavy:** You have to make a calculated judgment about the weight of an object or article. You can do this by lifting the edge or making a “test lift” before fully committing to picking it up and moving it. Hand carts should be used when moving cylinders in the dispensing area. Ask for help in loading cylinders into customer vehicles. Far better get help than suffer a back strain or injury.
- **Struggling with objects that are too bulky:** The issue may not be the weight of the object but whether it is too awkward or clumsy to handle and carry. If you can't comfortably grasp or enclose it with your arms, don't try it. If your arms are hyper extended you are vulnerable for back injury in addition to stumbling or falling.
- **Stacking or storing objects too low:** Much of the stress of lifting or bending can be avoided by storing and stacking materials, objects and supplies within the “power lifting range of the body”. This is the zone between mid thigh and the top of the shoulders. Lifting and handling within that area gives us maximum strength and prevents bending over to pick up items that cause great strain on back muscles and spinal structure. The simple solution may be to raise or lower shelving to avoid reaching too high or bending over to pull materials from shelves in an awkward and off balance position. The University of Oklahoma has done a study showing that a person with an upper body weight of 105 lbs. leaning over and picking up a 10 lb object puts 1,150 lbs of pressure on the lower back. It is clear to see that the greater the upper body weight and/or weight of the object the greater will be the danger of injury to the lower back.
- **Reaching and lifting:** Here the issue is the extension of the arms away from the body combined with slight bending forward or backward. This could mean reaching for an object or container across the table, above your head or over the side rail or tailgate of a pickup. It is the classic position to set up the back for injury even though the object may not be significant in weight. Take the time to get a safe ladder for the high stuff and open the tailgate of the pickup, get in and move the object to the surface of the tailgate. That will put it in the ideal lifting range for easy handling.

General good lifting techniques can be summarized this way. Stand close to the load to be lifted. Squat, bending at the knees rather than your waist. Get a firm grip and lift slowly. Keep the object as close to your body as possible. Avoid turning your torso while lifting. If you must turn to place your load, do so with your feet rather than twisting. Above all, use a mechanical means if at all possible such as a dolly, pallet jack, forklift, hoist, rolling cart or rolling platform. In the question of pushing or pulling an object, it is safer to push as it employs your weight and lessens back stress.

Questions for Thought and Discussion:

1. Does anyone have a back injury story?
2. What was the cause?
3. What was the cure?
4. What could have been the prevention?
5. Do we have any company policies that we could review here?



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