



February 1, 2008

## *Watch out! Data shows that 56 percent of injuries happen to employees during their first 12 months on the job!*

All of us have a vested interest in doing what we can to reduce the number of injuries at our farms and nurseries. Incidents result in injured workers and can lead to **increased** workers compensation claims, medical costs, time loss days, legal exposure, and insurance costs while **decreasing** productivity and employee morale. SAIF has recently provided the OAN Safety Committee with statistical data, specific to OAN members, which should be of great interest to each of us in our attempts to reduce the number of injuries at our farms and nurseries.

An alarming statistic is the fact that employees in their first 12 months contribute to 56.1 percent of the total number of injuries.<sup>1</sup> The graph shown here visually illustrates the significance of this reality. Additionally, the average cost of each of these injuries is over \$3,400.

### **Intervention Strategies:**

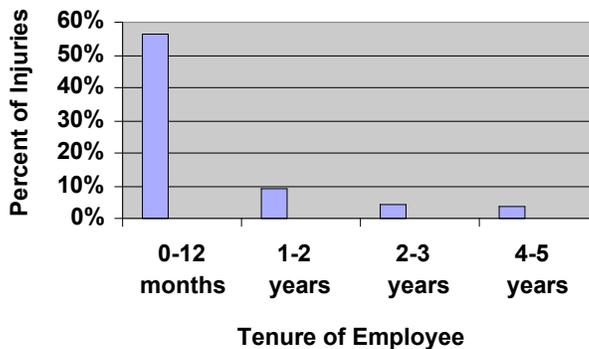
Knowing that the majority of injuries will occur within an employee's first year of employment should emphasize the importance of focusing on new hires: their selection, orientation, and training. It is in these critical months where we will be likely to reduce the greatest number of

injuries and workers' compensation claims. The following paragraphs challenge us by asking questions related to the stages an employee progresses through during their first 12 months.

**Selection:** Do you have selection procedures in place that evaluate whether an employee has the physical capacity to perform the essential functions of the job? Many employers have developed a pre-employment fitness test that

allows them to evaluate the applicant's ability to perform the physical aspects of the job<sup>2</sup>. Hiring someone to perform a job with physical requirements beyond an applicant's capability does not just limit productivity; it can be an invitation for an injury. SAIF statistics show that 34 percent of all injuries result from sprains and strains.

**Injuries by Tenure**



**Orientation:** Have you established a well developed plan for orientating all new employees? Do you have an orientation to safety at your farm or nursery that includes: safe practices, policies, lifting techniques, specific hazards, reporting, etc.? This is perhaps one of the most critical and overlooked steps in avoiding injuries. Without extensive and relevant safety orientation it should not surprise us that the vast majority of injuries happen as an employee begins a new job.

Time invested in orientation and training is likely to have a direct correlation to reducing the number of injuries within the first year.

<sup>1</sup> SAIF injury statistics, for the OAN Membership group, pertaining to policy years 2003-2007

## Training:

Safety training should go beyond any required OSHA standards and encompass job specific safety training that is relevant and timely.

Questions we should ask here include:

- **Do you provide safety training to your employees** when you begin a new work phase such as harvest, planting, shipping, etc?
- **Are your supervisors or crew leaders regularly explaining,** demonstrating, and enforcing, safe practices on the job?
- **Do you encourage your supervisors and crew leaders** to take the time to periodically observe employees to address unsafe practices and, more importantly, to provide positive feedback when safety protocols are being used?
- **Are employees encouraged to tell you about unsafe conditions?** And if so, are the conditions addressed swiftly?

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- **Is your safety training ongoing,** and does it address activity specific to the job and time of year?

We all have a part to play in ensuring safe practices at our farms and nurseries. Focusing on improving the areas of selection, orientation, and training can have a positive effect on lowering the number of injuries incurred by new employees. The reality that 56 percent of injuries occur during an employee's first 12 months is no coincidence. Don't let your next new hire become a statistic!

Respectfully,

## David Barker

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### Additional Resources:

- OAN online safety resources: <http://www.oan.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=69>
- Your workers compensation insurance provider and/or broker
- Oregon OSHA: <http://www.orosha.org/> or at (503) 378-3272

<sup>2</sup> ADA, ADEA, and job descriptions documenting essential job functions (including physical requirements) should be considered when developing a legally defensible pre-employment fitness test

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