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Important Steps in Reducing New Employee Injuries

-Second of four in a series

SAIF injury statistics show us that, among our OAN group, 56% of worker injuries occur in the first 12 months on the job. What can you as an employer do to prevent or lower this rate of injury? The first thing you can do is to focus on these new hires.

Do a pre-employment fitness test for all new hires.

Many employers have developed simple fitness tests that allow them to evaluate the applicant's ability to perform the physical aspects of the job. Statistics often show that a large percentage of injuries result from sprains, strains, and overexertion.

- Can applicants lift a certain amount of weight and carry it 50 feet?
- Can applicants demonstrate proper lifting techniques?
- Can applicants raise their arms above their head? Don't laugh, one employer incurred a \$70,000 worker's comp claim on a new employee who it was determined couldn't lift one arm above his shoulder when he was hired.

Do focus on orientation. Having a well developed plan not only fulfills the requirements of WPS and the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act, but it can also improve your bottom line by reducing workers injuries. You as an employer or manager need to insure that the new employee knows:

- That your nursery takes safety seriously. That all new hires are expected to follow all safety rules. That there is discipline process for failure to follow safety rules.
- What the precautions, warnings, and hazards are in work assignments. Where do they find this information?
- How do they perform their job safely? Do you provide ergonomic training showing the proper techniques for lifting? Do you

encourage employees to ask for help when they cannot safely lift or move something by themselves?

- What is the required personal protection equipment to use when doing certain jobs?
- Who do employees report unsafe conditions to?
- What do they do in the event of an injury?

Do make sure your supervisors buy-in to your safety program. Without strong leadership and enforcement of safe work procedures by your supervisors the best orientation and training will come to nothing.

- Clearly communicate that ensuring safe work practices is a responsibility of the supervisors. Supervisors should understand that they will be held accountable for the safety practices of their employees.
- Implement a reward program for supervisors that meet certain expectations. Make sure that the supervisors believe that their actions can achieve the goals of the safety program.

Do provide ongoing safety training. Safety training should not be limited to orientation. Ongoing training serves as a reminder to employees of specific safety hazards related to certain aspects of the job. It also reinforces the safety culture and the company's commitment to safe work practices. Safety training should go beyond any required OSHA standards and encompass job specific safety training that is relevant and timely. Questions to be considered in developing a safety training program should include:

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- Can the safety training coincide with a new work phase?
- Is your safety training ongoing, and does it address activity specific to the job and time of year?
- Are the supervisors supporting the training? Are they taking the time to periodically observe employees to address unsafe practices and, more importantly, to provide positive feedback when safety protocols are being used?
- Can you provide appropriate training materials or assign a competent individual to conduct the meeting?

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behavior has the capacity to impact the outcome of the safety program. A company-wide pizza party at the end of the year for certain reduction in time loss days may not be the best idea for an incentive that seeks to change an individual's daily work behavior. The closer the incentive is tied to an employee having the capacity to affect the outcome of the program the more likely it will impact their working behavior. Incentive programs should be simple, easy to communicate, and easily understood by the employee.

Respectfully,

David Barker

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OAN Safety Committee Member

Do employ incentive or reward programs for safe working behavior or safety records. It is important that the employee believe that his individual work

The OAN safety committee is looking for new committee members. The committee is a great way for people to learn new OSHA rules, new ideas on safety training and to network with other nursery people involved with safety programs. The committee meets 6 times per year at the OAN office in Wilsonville. If you or anyone else at your nursery is interested in becoming involved, please contact Krista Jeli at the OAN at 503-682-5089 or email kjeli@oan.org.

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

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