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ASSOCIATION OF  
NURSERIES

# Safety ALERT!

An important safety bulletin from the OAN Safety Committee

March 2009

## *Starting a Stretch and Flex Program*

*-Twelfth in a series*

Companies in different industries are having employees do stretches each day before the start of their shifts. If you are debating whether or not to start a stretching program at your work place, you may be asking the following questions:

- 1.) Where do I find assistance in setting up a program?
- 2.) Which stretches should be done?
- 3.) How will the stretching program be received by employees?
- 4.) What are the benefits of a stretch and flex program?

Let's start with finding help setting up a stretch program. I would suggest making an appointment with a local occupational therapist, workers compensation insurer loss control representative or other such professional to come to the workplace in order to view activities and determine the physical demands of the work practices.

This professional will be able to evaluate your work activities and recommend what kind of stretches to utilize. For example, if there is work like sprouting/suckering, hand tying, pruning, etc. which involve bending over, overhead use of arms/hands and repetitive hand work, the professional will be able to give you a set of stretches that will stretch and flex fingers, hands, wrists, arms, neck, etc.

Before starting a stretching program, let all managers, supervisors, and other key employees know about the plan. To help ensure that the stretching program will be well-received by the general employees, it is important that these key individuals understand your desire, as an employer, to reduce on-the-job injuries and improve worker health and morale. If possible have the professional who helped set up the program be there for the "stretch and flex initiation" with the safety committee and key employees for added credibility and accuracy.

I believe a simple stretch and flex program is beneficial, though a specific cause-and-effect relationship is difficult to prove. In one production area, the year prior to starting a stretch and flex program we had seven hand/wrist injuries. After starting a simple stretch and flex program the following year there was only one hand/wrist injury, in the same area. Over time we have added specific stretches after break times and lunch time when doing highly repetitive tasks.

It is imperative when considering and/or training new hires to stress the importance of safety and health on the job. With information from SAIF Corporation, we know that 56.1 percent of all work related injuries in the OAN group workers' comp program are incurred by employees in their first 12 months of employment.

To reduce this risk, job descriptions for prospective employees must emphasize that safety is a company priority; this philosophy should be stressed throughout the application and interview process.

A stretch and flex program can be used to evaluate the ability of prospective employees to follow instructions and perform some of the basic physical aspects of the job. This is done by observing them doing the stretches. If stretches are not done correctly ask why and listen carefully to the response--these can then be used as a part of the hiring evaluation process.

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In order for a stretch and flex program to be effective it is not only important to train employees but then to take the time to observe employees as they stretch. A stretch and flex program is not a body building program but if designed correctly it will stretch and flex individuals so they are loosened up and ready to work.

Respectfully,

Sonia Fernandez  
Carlton Plants  
OAN Safety Committee Member

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*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](mailto: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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