



Wellness & Workplace Occupational Health & Safety

Both wellness and workplace occupational health and safety (OHS) have benefits to employees and employers alike. While both can be implemented separately, there are proven additional benefits to combining the two programs into one overall Employee Health, Safety, and Wellness (HSW) Program where the total is greater than the sum of the parts. Combine your efforts in these 12 areas and enjoy improved wellness.

1. Obesity and ergonomics/cancers: Studies show that people who are overweight or obese (O/O) are more likely to have ergonomics problems and are more likely to have greater worker's compensation (WC) claims. Also, people who are O/O are more likely to get cancer, including breast, colon, lung, prostate, and others. Drop some weight and lower cancer and ergo risks.

2. Smoking and ergonomics, carbon monoxide, and asbestos: Studies have shown that smokers tend to have more ergonomic problems. Smokers also have higher levels of carbon monoxide (CO) gas in their blood. This puts smokers at greater risk of CO poisoning, depending on the levels in their blood. Smokers are more likely than non-smokers to get lung cancer from asbestos.

3. Fitness and ergonomics: Fitness level and ergonomics are related-as one goes up, the other goes down (and vice versa).

4. Job activity level and prostate cancer: Job activity level and prostate cancer are also related (as one goes up, the other goes down). So men need to be more active in their jobs to cut prostate cancer risk. Get up & walk around more if you work in an office; take the stairs; and park farther away. Lots of little activities add up and do make a difference.

5. Exposures off and on the job-asbestos, CO, solvents, acids/bases, sensitizers, lead: It's pretty obvious. There are many chemicals and other hazardous substances that you can be exposed to at home and off the job. Asbestos in older homes, CO from vehicles (and other combustion sources), solvents in cleaners and degreasers, acids and bases in cleaners: the list goes on. Examine what you can do to avoid /minimize your exposure?

6. Healthy foods at work and obesity and cancers: We eat at least one meal at work, often two, and sometimes even all three in a day. Nutritional needs are at least one-half of the O/O problems in the United States. We tend to eat whatever is readily available to us, regardless of its nutritional value and our will power. O/O is linked to several cancers and other chronic and costly health issues (diabetes, metabolic syndrome, heart disease, etc.) We can all do better in the food choices we make on a daily basis.

7. Driving safely: Without even counting fatal accidents during normal work commutes, driving is the leading cause of work related fatalities.

8. Generic link to disease and target organs of chemicals: There is a great saying: "Your genes load the gun-the environment pulls the trigger." For many of us, the gun is already loaded. We have heart disease, high blood pressure, various cancers, etc. in our gene pool, and so it's even more important for us to avoid environmental factors that are linked to those diseases. Some environmental triggers are the chemicals and other hazardous substances we're exposed to at work and off the job. Chemicals typically "target" certain organs, that is, they cause damage to specific organs. These "target organs" vary between chemicals. Some examples include asbestos, silica, and many mineral dusts, which target the lungs and respiratory system. Acetone and other solvents target the brain, central nervous system (CNS), skin, etc. Methylene chloride is also linked to the blood system and the liver (causing cancer). Benzene is linked to the blood system and causes leukemia. Lead has many target organs, including the brain and

CNS, heart, kidneys, liver, and reproductive system (making it a “teratogen”). Look for this information on Material Safety Data Sheets.

9. Stress: Work related stress is a common factor in employee surveys and complaints. The effects of stress on the body are many and varied. These include mental health, obesity, the gastrointestinal (GI) system, heart, endocrine system, tooth and gum disease, and diabetes, to name a few. Reducing stress (both at home and at work) is an obvious way to reduce health problems and complaints. Worker complaints about stress are often tied to a lack of control over their work and workload. If you’re feeling stressed out (at work or at home), ask about your company’s employee assistance plan (EAP).

10. Home safety and work safety: More accidents occur off the job than on the job and that’s just to workers. It does not include non-workers (e.g. children and the elderly or infirmed). These accidents account for 25 percent more lost time than on-the-job accidents, too. Focusing solely on work related accidents is getting at less than half of the problem and causes. Ask your safety representative about home safety.

11. Behavior-based safety and lifestyle changes: We are creatures of habit, and many of us would attest to the cliché, “old habits are hard to break.” Whether they are safety-related habits at work (e.g., wearing my PPE) or personal health-related habits (e.g., eating a lot of fried foods), they impact our overall health and safety. USA safety looks at ladder safety constantly but I personally have a ladder in my home that would not pass my inspection here at work. I can attribute this to my behavior or not wanting to buy a new ladder, therefore I take risks in my home that I would not if I was at work. We all can do better at making our homes safe. There are many web sites about home safety, but here is one I thought was worth mentioning, <http://www.homesafetycouncil.org/index.asp>.

12. Electrical safety at work and Home: Around 1000 electrical accidents at work are reported each year and about 25 people die of their injuries.

Many deaths and injuries at work arise from:

- Use of poorly maintained electrical equipment;
- Work near overhead power lines;
- Contact with underground power cables during excavation work; Mains electricity supplies (230 volt);
- Use of unsuitable electrical equipment in explosive areas such as car paint spraying booths

Fires started by poor electrical installations and faulty electrical appliances cause many additional deaths and injuries.

It’s easy to practice electrical safety. Remember that electricity always takes the shortest way to the ground. It will go through wire, metal, wet objects... or you. It’s invisible, but very real, so treat it with respect.

Wires run around, through and over our houses. And each year hundreds are electrocuted in their homes, and thousands are injured in electricity-related accidents. Accidents can be prevented with a little foresight, and some common sense.

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