

Wellness Reduces Work Comp Costs

Can obesity, a growing epidemic in the U.S., affect workers compensation claims?

Yes, according to data from the American Medical Association.

The organization reports that obese workers miss five times as many workdays and have double the medical costs when injured at work than non-obese workers.

With obesity affecting more than 30% of Americans, what can employers do to keep their workers compensation costs down?

Many employers have implemented a wellness program to improve workers' weight-related health.



Employers can structure programs that reward employees for attending health screenings, reducing their body mass index, ceasing smoking and a variety of other activities aimed at curbing workers compensation and health insurance costs.

Wellness programs must be created and managed in such a manner that no laws and/or regulations are violated. This can be difficult, but we can help. For more information on wellness programs that

can help your firm's workers and reduce overall medical costs, call our service team today. ■

Monitor Workers Comp Claims

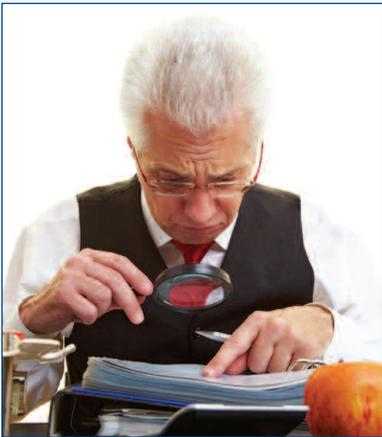
Monitoring the progress of your injured employee's workers compensation claim could save your firm thousands of dollars in premiums and lost productivity.

In addition to researching the reason for the injury and taking necessary steps to avoid a similar incident, employers should learn to monitor incurred losses. These losses are the amount of money the insurance company has paid for the claim resulting from the injury as well as what the company is holding in reserve for future payments.

Reserves are not exact numbers; they vary based on factors including type of injury and expected duration of the claim. Employers may choose to challenge the validity of outstanding reserves. If an agreement is reached and the amount of the reserve is lowered, incurred losses go down. This will improve the firm's overall loss experience, which translates into lower premiums.

Want to know more about monitoring your firm's workers compensation claims? We can help. Call our service team today. ■

Mid-Year Audit



While the idea of frequent auditing might make you cringe, working together with your insurance agent on a mid-year policy audit could identify omissions and/or mistakes that are costing your firm precious premium dollars.

A mid-year audit should be conducted at least six months prior to the policy renewal. This will help ensure that any claims reserves being held are correct. In addition, this review can ensure that all class codes being used to generate premium are correctly applied. Further, agents and insurance buyers can review possible subrogation recoveries and make certain they are correctly applied to the workers compensation premium.

These few tasks are just a sample of the advantages of a mid-year audit plan. Such a plan could save your firm from overpaying thousands of dollars in workers compensation premiums. For more information, call our service team today. ■

Recreational Activity Claims

Could an employee who is injured while participating in a company-related recreational activity qualify for workers compensation benefits?

According to Christopher Boggs, author of *The Insurance Professional's Practical Guide to Worker's Compensation: From History Through Audit*, the outcome of the question is based on four tests:

- Was the accident on the employer's premises?
- Was the event (or team) organized by the employer?
- Did the employer pay for the activity?
- Did the employer benefit from the activity in some manner?

"Yes" answers do not confirm benefits are payable; however, they do link the employer to the injury in some fashion and could be the basis for argument by legal counsel if benefits are denied. In addition, some states are harsher toward employers than others on the issue of compensating employees injured in work-related recreational activities.

Employers should seek answers before the injury occurs to avoid becoming involved in a legal action over benefits. Give us a call before your next event. Our service team can help you determine how your state's laws address such injuries. ■

Teens in Restaurants

As the summer approaches, many of America's youth will search for opportunities to enter the workforce. A common target for eager young workers is the restaurant industry. According to OSHA, restaurants and other eating and drinking establishments employ 11.6 million people in the United States. Nearly 30% of these employees are under 20 years of age. OSHA has created an eTool as a resource for employers and their youthful workers in the restaurant industry to be safe and healthy on the job.

The eTool describes common hazards and potential safety solutions for teen workers and employers in the restaurant industry. It offers information on preventing common injuries associated with serving,



cleaning, cooking, delivery and other aspects of the industry. It also has links to various state and federal laws addressing the employment of minors. Employers, parents and young workers can access this valuable resource through OSHA's website, www.osha.gov/SLTC/youth/restaurant/index.html. ■

Machine Guards Reduce Injuries

OSHA's Machinery and Machine Guarding Standard (29 CFR 1910.212-219) states that one or more methods of machine guarding must be provided to protect operators and others from hazards, including those created by the point of operation, ingoing nip points, rotating parts, flying chips, and sparks.

While it seems unthinkable that employers would knowingly compromise the safety of workers by using improperly guarded machines, machine-guarding violations make OSHA's top 10

most violated regulations list every year. OSHA says that many of these employers knowingly remove or disable guards for faster operations and/or reduced maintenance.

Such guards defend against horrific injuries that result in death, amputations and mangled limbs. Employers should follow a few simple guidelines when dealing with machine guarding, according to Business and Legal Reports' *Safety Daily Advisor*. These guidelines include:

- Having a checklist that confirms

that all guards are in place before turning the machine on.

- Never using a machine with a missing or malfunctioning guard and reporting discrepancies immediately.

- Using lockout/tag-out procedures when guards are removed for service and, after service, having a checklist that helps confirm the guard is in working order.

For more information on preventing machine-guard injuries and avoiding costly OSHA violations, visit www.osha.gov. ■

Head Trauma Needs Special Care

Head injuries have received increased attention over the past year when some celebrities died from them. They are particularly tricky issues in the workplace and need special attention.

Head injuries can range from mild to severe but can appear the same immediately after the trauma occurs. The trouble may come hours or even days later when the brain begins to swell, affecting motor and involuntary functions of the body, including breathing. In the earliest stages of a brain injury, the victim may appear to have little problem. They may seem to

have just "had their bell rung." A victim might not even lose consciousness. Later, however, they may experience headache,



nausea, confusion, vision problems or other unusual physical ailments.

If any of your employees suffers

a head injury of any kind, play it safe. Have them seen by a physician immediately and ensure that they are informed of the signs of

brain swelling. If an employee returns to work after a blow to the head, make sure others are attentive to signs of problems, such as lethargy, confusion, irritability and general malaise. These can be signs of escalating intracranial injury that needs to be addressed by an exam or even CAT scans.

Remember, also, to prevent head trauma by observing and enforcing all appropriate headwear guidelines. It could save a life. ■

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your referrals.**

If you're pleased with us,
spread the word! We'll be
happy to give the same great
service to all of your friends
and business associates.

Are You Up on Workers Comp Benefits?

If one of your workers suffers a job-related illness or injury, how can they expect to be compensated?

Workers compensation benefits vary depending on applicable state law; however, if an employee is injured, the policy will pay 100% of the associated medical costs. Many policies will also pay the full cost of rehabilitation and other necessary treatment expenses.

Compensation due is also determined by the extent of injury. Most payments are based on classifications, such as temporary total disability, permanent total disability, permanent partial disability, and temporary partial disability.

Scheduled benefits may be subject to state-mandated maximums. For more information on your state's workers compensation benefits schedule, call our service team today. ■
