

# Common Workplace Injuries and How to Prevent Them

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## Introduction

As a supporter of the National Safety Council's National Safety Month, State Compensation Insurance Fund stresses the importance of workplace safety and efforts to keep employees safe. A top priority in running your business should be enacting preventative measures and practices to prevent injuries. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), work-related injuries and illnesses cost an estimated \$171 billion each year, and in these tough economic times, the financial impact of injured workers is highlighted. By keeping your employees healthy and able to work, you improve attendance and keep production rates high. The cost of a lost workday due to injury or illness is substantial. At State Compensation Insurance Fund, we believe that when it comes to injuries in the workplace, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." We offer many resources to help you make your workplace safe for and help your employees avoid workplace injuries. (<http://www.scif.com>)

Injuries: Costs to the Employer
1. Lost employee productivity
2. Lost supervisor productivity (lost time in caring for injured worker)
3. Interrupted operations
4. Need to hire or retrain workers
5. Added time and costs of repair or replacement of damaged equipment involved in accident
6. Reduced employee morale
7. Continuing all or part of the employee's wages, in addition to compensation

## Common Injuries and Illnesses

Most Common Work-Related Injuries (Goods-producing private industries)
Sprains, strains (55%)
Cuts, lacerations (11%)
Fractures (10%)
Bruises, contusions (10%)
Multiple traumatic injuries (7%)
Heat burns (2%)
Carpal Tunnel syndrome (2%)
Amputations (1%)
Punctures (1%)
Tendonitis (1%)
Chemical burns (.5%)

What are the most common injuries and illnesses in the goods-producing industry? In order to prevent occupational hazards, you must be able to recognize them. As identified in the above table, sprains and strains make up 55 percent of injuries in the workplace. The other 10 recorded injuries each make up less than 10 percent of total injuries. Sprains and strains are commonly caused by lifting, pushing or overreaching, and usually over long periods of time. They usually affect the back, arms and shoulders. For more information on ergonomics and preventing sprains and strains, visit:

<http://www.scif.com/safety/safetymeeting/Article.asp?ArticleID=88>.

<b>Preventing Sprains and Strains</b>
1. Lift correctly: Bend your knees, <b>not</b> your back, and carry loads close to your body and at waist level
2. Get help with heavy loads
3. Change working positions frequently: Chronic strain due to an unchanging work position makes workers susceptible to injury
4. Take body relaxation breaks to stretch
5. Care for the whole body: Exercise, practice proper posture, eat a sensible diet, and rest

**Return on Interest: Protecting Your Employees with an Injury Prevention Program**

Workplace injuries often hit small businesses the hardest. Small business owners may lack the knowledge to identify and prevent hazards and injuries. Even more unfortunate, many safety and health regulations are aimed toward large businesses, leaving small-business employers left in the lurch as to what to do to prevent workplace injuries. Finally, because they have fewer employees, having one incapacitated can have an outsized effect.

Risking the safety and health of your employees is a gamble you don't need to take, and prevention is the key to protecting your employees and business. As an employer, it is important to identify steps to promote the safety and health of your employees. In doing so, enact policies and procedures to achieve the goals you set for your business. By providing your employees with adequate training, implementing safety procedures and posting signage, you are already ahead of the game in keeping your workers safe and healthy.

State Fund stresses the importance of enacting an Injury Prevention Program (IIPP), which is required of all employers by California law. An IIPP is a written plan that details the required steps employers must take to protect their employees from workplace hazards. For more information, including hazard checklists, safety catalogues and an online IIPP Builder, please visit <http://www.scif.com>

<b>Steps to Prevent Workplace Injuries</b>
1. Define clear written rules and safety procedures specific to each particular job. Ensure written rules and procedures apply to all employees, managers, and supervisors.
2. Enact a training program; educate all new employees and provide refresher sessions with current employees.
3. Enact a Workplace Injury and Illness Prevention Program – in California; you have a legal obligation to do so.
4. Ensure only trained employees use risky equipment.
5. Post signage around workplace.
6. Supervise: Monitor whether equipment is used properly.
7. Implement a rewards program: Reward procedures (bonuses, incentives, recognition) ensure safety plans are practiced and enforced.
8. Develop a written plan for emergency situations and ensure everyone is familiar with it.
9. Designate Emergency response teams: Employees who are trained for specific and imminent hazards.

As an employer, one of the most effective actions you can take is to set a good example. Ensure that you and your management comply with the safety precautions you require your employees to take, whether this be participating in training or wearing a hard hat on site. Your participation in and support of a safe workplace is key to preventing workplace injuries and keeping your workers safe, healthy, and productive.