Common Workplace Injuries Meeting Kit

Workplace injuries are injuries or illnesses that occur in relation to an employee's job. Generally, a workplace injury occurs because the work environment is unsafe (the premises are dangerous, the equipment is defective, or the environment is contaminated with hazardous chemicals). In addition, jobs that require repetitive or difficult movements (eg. factory labor or heavy lifting) may cause injury.

COMMON CAUSES OF WORKPLACE INJURIES

Falls and Other Traumatic Injuries: Falls are common among construction workers, miners, and factory employees. Many construction accidents involve falls from defective ladders or scaffoldings. A fall from several stories up can break bones, cause internal injuries, and even result in permanent paralysis or death. Workers who do sustain such injuries can expect to miss a significant period of time at work while recovering, and many are never able to return.

Repetitive Motion Injuries: Repetitive motion injuries are the result of performing one characteristic movement over and over. For instance, many workers who spend their days typing at a computer keyboard without proper ergonomic protection suffer carpal tunnel syndrome, rendering many incapable of continuing to type for long periods. Employers are required to foresee such risks and provide appropriate protection to their employees.

Chronic Exposure Conditions: Many high-risk jobs involve exposure to toxic substances. Miners and industrial workers whose jobs require working with hazardous chemicals and minerals are entitled to appropriate safety equipment and other safeguards to prevent illness due to chronic exposure. The classic example of this scenario is asbestos exposure. Those who were exposed to asbestos in the mid- to late-20th century have since developed mesothelioma

and other life-threatening health problems because they were not sufficiently protected.

Psychological and Emotional Trauma: Not all workplace injuries are physical in nature. Many workers develop severe psychological problems due to the nature of their work. A hostile workplace environment, in which some workers are the victims of discrimination or abuse based on gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, or other factors, can be psychologically and emotionally devastating. Many workers in extremely hazardous or high-stress jobs develop stress-related disorders that require costly treatment and render them unable to continue working.

Defective or Hazardous Equipment: One of the most common causes of workplace injuries is defective or hazardous equipment. Equipment may be hazardous if it is poorly designed, manufactured, assembled, or repaired. Anything from complicated heavy machinery and power tools to ladders and scaffolds can cause a disabling or fatal injury given the right circumstances. These types of accidents are particularly common at construction and mining sites.

Hazardous Materials: Many workers are exposed to toxic substances. Employees whose jobs involve working with toxic substances have a right to appropriate safeguards so they are not at an unnecessary risk for illness or injury. For example, many workers in the asbestos industry were exposed to unsafe levels of asbestos during the 20th century and are now developing mesothelioma, asbestosis, lung cancer, and other conditions as a result.

Motor Vehicle Mishaps: Motor vehicles are integral to many peoples' jobs, and where there are motor vehicles, there is always a risk. These accidents may be caused by reckless drivers or by equipment malfunctions. They are often serious and deadly.

WHY WORKPLACE ACCIDENTS OCCUR

Insufficient Safety Guidelines

All workplaces are required to establish and enforce appropriate

safety guidelines in order to protect their employees. Workplaces that fail to do so are nearly always hazardous.

Insufficient Training

Many workers are injured each year because they or their co-workers do not receive the training necessary to foster a safe workplace. All employers are obligated to train their employees thoroughly in order to avoid injuries. Workers who are undertrained or asked to perform duties for which they are unqualified put themselves and others at risk.

Reckless Co-Worker Conduct

Employees can injure their co-workers when they behave recklessly or under the influence in spite of thorough safety training and appropriate guidelines. In these cases, the reckless individuals can be held responsible, but so can their supervisors and those who hired them.

BEST SAFETY PRACTICES TO PREVENT WORKPLACE INJURIES

- Train employees on smart lifting practices like lifting with their knees
- Mandate the use of safety harnesses, back braces, and lift aids
- Require frequent breaks for employees who maintain a particular position for sustained periods
- Invest in ergonomic furniture
- Encourage employees to change tasks when possible
- Clean spills immediately upon discovery
- Use “wet floor” signs after mopping or spills
- Place nonslip tape on steps or frequently used paths
- Install handrails where traffic on steps is frequent and heavy
- Encourage employees to use nonslip soles on shoes
- Hire an expert to review your safety procedures
- Require regular workplace safety training

- Make sure all equipment is secure throughout the day
- Limit loads on any motorized vehicles to ensure the operator has a clear view
- Instruct employees to use the appropriate safety equipment
- Discipline employees who misbehave near machinery, motorized vehicles, and other heavy equipment

FINAL WORD

Workplace injuries happen in workplaces where the premises are unsafe, the equipment is defective or the environment is contaminated.