Dealing with a Workplace Injury or Death

What’s at Stake?

Witnessing or being involved in a horrible situation at work—such as a fall from heights, machinery entanglement or extreme workplace violence—can haunt an individual for years. The stress of not dealing with emotional trauma can seriously harm your career, relationships and mental and physical health.

What’s the Danger?

Many people require professional help to prevent short-term shock from turning into something more serious and longer lasting – post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Consider this story. A construction crew was caught in a building collapse. Only one worker survived. After the incident, she experienced extreme survivor’s guilt and PTSD. She didn’t want to appear weak or helpless so she did not seek or receive help, and, sadly, a month after the incident she committed suicide.

How to Protect Yourself

Be on the lookout for signs of trauma:

- Re-living the event through unwanted thoughts, images, memories, hallucinations, or dreams.
- Feelings of intense stress when faced with a reminder of the event.
- Avoidance of anything associated with the event.
- Emotional disturbances such as difficulty with expressing feelings, depression and withdrawal.
- Sleep problems, rage, inability to concentrate and anxiety.
- Increased blood pressure, hyperventilation, muscle tension

or spasms, nausea, or diarrhea.

Tools for coping with traumatic incidents:

- Take advantage of company programs and procedures for dealing with a fatality.
    - Feelings such as grief, guilt and anger can make it hard for you to do your job, so take advantage of crisis counseling.
    - In fact, mental health experts strongly recommend that workers involved in a traumatic incident talk to a professional within a day or two of the event.
- Seek support from your co-workers and offer support to them.
    - Often you will find it easiest to talk to fellow employees who were present at the time of the incident.
    - Remember, seeking support of co-workers or mental health professionals is not a sign of weakness.
- Finally, keep yourself informed of the facts of the case. Staying up-to-date on details will give you a better understanding of the event, and therefore, a greater sense of control.

Final Word

Know that resources are available to you for dealing with a traumatic event. It will be easier to cope if you know where to start. Doing nothing is not a healthy option.