Protect Your Back

How This Affects You:

Your back is used in all you do, on and off the job, and hurting it can have severe consequences: a lifetime of pain, inability to work or play and reduced income.

There’s an alternative, though. You can follow safe work practices to prevent injuries, and practice back care at all times.

Back injuries come in two major types: the first is traumatic injury, caused by a single incident such as a fall, a car crash or a misjudged dive into water. If the spinal cord is injured the victim may lose the use of any or all limbs.

To prevent traumatic back injuries:

- Always wear a seatbelt in a motor vehicle.
- Wear fall arrest equipment and follow all safe work practices when working at heights.
- Before diving into water, be sure it is deep enough and that there are no underwater obstructions.
- Never mix alcohol or drugs with water sports, snowmobiling or other recreational activities.
- Don’t attempt to catch a heavy object if it falls or someone tosses it to you.

The second sort of back injury is cumulative. Cumulative injuries happen when years of back abuse and minor strains and sprains add up to a back injury which can be seriously disabling.

To help prevent cumulative back injuries:

- Don’t sit or stand too long in one position. If your job requires you to stand, alternate feet on a raised footrest. Floor mats can also prevent back strains if you’re required to stand at a work station through your whole shift.
- Lift correctly. Size up the load before attempting to pick it up. Get help or use a mechanical lifting device if

necessary.

- Lift with your legs, not your back. Bend your knees and keep your back straight. Crouch down close to the object and lift by straightening your legs.
- Do not twist, bend or extend your arms when you are lifting or carrying an object, and hold the object as close to your body as possible.
- Don’t attempt to lift or move an object above your shoulder height.
- Practice good posture at all times – reasonably straight while maintaining the three natural curves in your back.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Excess pounds are a direct cause of numerous cumulative back problems.

Back care is a safety basic that must be part of every activity you do. Using caution at work and off the job can prevent back problems.