

# CR & R

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By Caitlyn Scheuermann

## Limit Your Lifting Injuries



**B**ack injuries have been plaguing workers for ages. A Bureau of Labor Statistics report stated that more than 36 percent of injuries that resulted in an employee missing work in 2001 were the result of a back- or shoulder-related injury. Improper lifting of heavy objects proved to be the cause of a majority of these types of injuries.

A study conducted by Safety Group Managers Innovative Risk Concepts Inc. found that lifting injuries accounted for 13.5 percent of all claims reported in 2013 from its Safety Group 568 members, the New York State Building Service Contractors Trade Group. On average, back injuries account for nearly 20 percent of all injuries and illnesses that occur in the workplace, according to a 2014 *InteliHealth* article.

Injuries that come as a result of improper lifting are, for the most part, highly preventable. Federal regulations do not mandate how employers must train their staffs in terms of lifting techniques. However, an abundance of information is available to help ensure that employees are properly trained and limit the number of workplace injuries that are the result of improper lifting.

The most common type of injuries that occur as a result of improper lifting are muscle/ligament strains and tears, fractured vertebrae and slipped or herniated disks. Some of these injuries may be minor and allow the employee to return to work relatively soon with some limitations. Others can be quite serious, require surgery and may result in the employee being unable to return to work. It is also important to note that while back injuries tend to be the most common type of injuries due to improper lifting, shoulder, neck, wrist, hand, foot and arm injuries are also common.

Make sure that your employees are properly educated on proper lifting techniques. Here are some simple tips to include in your training:

**1. Plan ahead.** When getting ready to lift an object, make sure that you know how much it weighs and that you have enough room to safely lift it.

- 2. Get help.** If the object is more than 50 pounds, ask another employee to help with lifting. If another employee is unavailable, the object should only be moved using a hand truck or dolly.
- 3. Don't rush.** Take your time when moving heavy objects. The risk for injury will increase when you hurry.
- 4. Bend at the knees.** Never bend from your waist when lifting an object. You should always bend at the knees, rise slowly and keep your back straight.

“By implementing proper safety training for your employees, you will greatly reduce your risk for work-related injuries and potentially lower your workers' compensation premium.”

- 5. Keep it close.** Keep the object and your elbows close to your body. This will reduce the strain on your body and reduce the risk of injury.
- 6. Don't twist.** Avoid twisting your body while lifting or carrying heavy objects. Turn your whole body, always keeping your back and feet in line.
- 7. Use the “power zone” for storage.** Heavy objects should be stored at mid-thigh to mid-chest level, or the “power

zone.” This will reduce the amount of strain on the body when moving these objects later.

8. **Wear the right stuff.** Protect yourself with the proper attire. You should never wear open-toed shoes when lifting heavy objects. Wear a back belt when necessary.
9. **Take a break.** If you are doing repetitive lifting, you should take a break at least once an hour and stretch. Overexertion is a leading cause for lower back injuries.
10. **Say something.** If you feel pain at any point when lifting a heavy object, let someone know immediately. Continuing to lift heavy objects may lead to a more severe injury.

By implementing proper safety training for your employees, you will greatly reduce your risk for

work-related injuries and potentially lower your workers' compensation premium. The fewer workers' compensation claims that you report each year, the more you will see your loss experience rating decrease along with your premium.

For more information on safety trainings, you can contact your local chapter of the National Safety Council, refer to the OSHA website or contact your workers' compensation insurance carrier or safety group manager. **RIA**

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*Caitlyn Scheuermann is the marketing coordinator at The IRC Group Services Inc., an insurance brokerage based in Ridgewood, N.J., that specializes in workers' compensation in New York and New Jersey for maintenance and janitorial contractors. She is a licensed insurance producer in New Jersey and New York.*



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