

Overexerting can lead to workplace injury

By SCF Arizona

Preventing injuries caused by overexertion can be a concern for employers in Arizona's intense summer heat. According to "Injury Facts 2011," an annual work safety publication, overexertion accounts for about 3.3 million emergency room visits and is the third leading cause of unintentional injuries in the United States.

SCF Arizona, the state's leading workers' compensation insurance company, advises Arizona businesses that many jobs require demanding physical activity. Workers who become tired or fatigued are more susceptible to overexerting themselves and are more likely to suffer injuries as a result.

SCF Premier Insurance Co. Loss Control Consultant Dennis Reilly likens overexertion to "holding your breath, which results in depletion of oxygen to the muscles." He said the result is an immediate collapse of strength during a time when the worker needs it most.

This can occur while the worker is performing physical demanding tasks such as carrying, lifting, lowering, pulling, pushing and turning, Reilly said.

The most common cause of overexertion is a worker's desire to save time under work productivity demands. SCF Arizona Loss Control Consultant Sandra Bencic reminds employers that if their main concern is to increase productivity, overexertion of employees ultimately decreases their efforts and may result in workers' compensation claims.

Overexertion also can occur when workers fail to ask for assistance when performing a physically demanding task. Employers that establish a culture of cooperation, in which co-workers always are willing to ask help from their colleagues, can reduce injury claims caused by overexertion, Reilly said.

The kinds of injuries caused by overexertion vary depending on the industry. However, employers that are aware of their accident history can identify procedural controls to reduce potential injuries, Reilly said. He offered these suggestions for workers:

- Take short, frequent breaks
- Cool down and rehydrate
- Be familiar with the weight of objects you are about to handle
- Ask for assistance when necessary
- Don't increase a load to avoid an extra trip
- Don't overextend your reach, resulting in holding your breath
- Adhere to safety policy procedures and use correct lifting techniques
- Take further caution if you have any health conditions that may interfere with your ability to perform a particular task, especially strenuous tasks

Tips for employers include:

- Train your workers on the dangers of overexertion
- Educate your employees on proper body mechanics

- Give your employees specific examples of overexertion at their particular job site
- Conduct hands-on training where each person demonstrates proper lifting and handling techniques
- Allow frequent breaks
- Rotate employees when possible
- Create a disciplinary policy for cases of overexertion

SCF has safety materials that address working in the heat and lifting and carrying items. They can be ordered by visiting our website, www.scfaz.com. "Heat Stress," a free safety training video, also can be viewed and is available in Spanish.