Tool Box Talks – Lifting and Manual Material Handling

Background
Over the last 5 years, strain injuries accounted for 22% of injury frequency and 30% of worker compensation costs for DPW employees within LWMMI. The underlying causes of these injuries were job tasks related to lifting and manual material handling of tools, equipment and other materials. Manual material handling, or MMH, includes risk factors such as lifting, bending, reaching, pulling and twisting with a combination of these making the exposure worse. These jobs performed manually are leading causes of serious strain injuries: Removing manhole covers, exercising/turning valves and lifting heavy equipment.

Prior to Lifting and Manual Handling
Before beginning a task that could result in injury, you should:

- Pre-job assessment – Review the hazards and safe work practices of the job with a supervisor.
- Proper Tools & Equipment – Verify that the correct tools and equipment and being used for the job. Use powered tools and lift-assist equipment whenever possible rather than performing the task manually.
- PPE – Use the proper PPE for the job being completed.
- Stretching – Warm up before starting any manual material handling tasks.
- Injury Types – Understand the accidents that could happen because of improper material handling:
  - Back, shoulder, arm and neck injuries are the most common serious injuries from lifting.
  - Hands and fingers — cuts, splinters, pinched fingers, etc.
  - Feet, toes and legs — losing balance or dropping a heavy object.
  - Eyes, head and trunk — opening a wire-bound box, handling cable or metal strapping, etc.

Best Practices for Performing Tasks Manually
If powered or lift-assist equipment is not available and the job must be completed manually, these suggestions may reduce the potential for injury:

- Face the load and avoid twisting your body by moving your feet in the direction of travel.
- Determine the center of gravity to keep the load balanced.
- Keep the load close to your body and carry it at knuckle height.
- Don't jerk the load. If something is stuck or jammed, use powered equipment or a leverage tool.
- Make sure the path of travel is free of obstructions or slipping hazards.
- Use 2 or more coworkers for lifts that are heavy or awkward.
- When you set the load down, maintain proper posture with the back straight.

These Reminders May Help You on the Job
- Utilize mechanical lifting devices whenever possible. Use accessories that assist with lifting if able, such as hooks and handles, crowbars, rollers and cradles, jacks, hand trucks, dollies, wheelbarrows, shovels, etc.
- Consider your physical condition and age when planning a job task activity. Stop and rest when you feel tired.
- If a task involves deep bending or stooping, raise the load to waist level before performing the lift.
- Inspect materials for slivers, jagged edges, burrs, rough or slippery surfaces, protruding nails, etc.
- If it appears a load is too heavy or bulky to handle, ask for help.
- Always make sure your hands are free of oil and grease to ensure a firm grip.
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