

# Top 10 Causes of Workplace Injuries

by Christina Hamlett



No matter how attentive and conscientious you are about observing health and safety rules on the job, the potential for workplace injuries is ever-present. Not only can these injuries put employees at risk of hospitalization -- or even death -- it also can impact insurance rates, reduce productivity, increase workers' compensation claims and affect company morale. Team vigilance at all levels is critical in maintaining a safe environment and preventing accidents from happening.

## **Fatigue**

If someone is pushed -- or pushes herself -- beyond reasonable limits to stay on top of workload, the results often are physical and mental exhaustion. This translates to impaired judgment, slower reflexes in operating machinery or motor vehicles, a delayed response to emergency situations and inattention to details and instructions.

## **Stress**

Job security, finances, health issues and anxiety about personal relationships all factor into the stress equation. When an employee's mind is too distracted by real or perceived threats, he is not only more likely to make mistakes that could cause injury but also invites an increased risk of a heart attack, stroke or hypertension.

## **Slips**

Office kitchens and break rooms are common places for slips to occur because of the number of liquids that get splashed there and are subsequently not cleaned up. Linoleum, hardwood and tile flooring surfaces are particularly hazardous after they have been mopped or waxed. Another consideration is the type of footwear worn by employees.

## **Trips**

Items left sitting out in a high-traffic corridor, extension cords that are not properly taped down and carpeting that has come loose all are contributors to tripping employees and sometimes causing more than just stubbed toes. Poorly lit hallways and stairs are danger spots, too, because they obscure the ability to see what is underfoot.

## **Toppling Objects**

If tall pieces of furniture such as bookcases and filing components are not securely anchored, an earthquake could cause them to pitch forward and dislodge their contents, putting nearby workers in peril. Workplace injuries also can be caused by heavy objects such as supplies and file boxes that are stacked on high shelves and are shifted precariously to the edge each time they are put back or the structure gets bumped.

## **Hazardous Materials**

Protective clothing, eye wear and gloves are mandatory for employees whose jobs require them to be around hazardous materials, chemicals and toxic waste. Slip-ups in these rules can result in burns, explosions, respiratory diseases, blindness and skin infections.

## **Repetitive Motion**

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a common occurrence for workers engaged in repetitive motion activities that put pressure on the median nerve, causing numbness and pain in the fingers, wrists and hands. Typists, key data operators and beauty salon employees are at particular risk for developing this excruciating condition.

## **Lifting**

Many back injuries and pulled muscles that occur in the workplace are the result of picking up something that is too heavy, not bending the legs, not asking a partner to assist or trying to lift or hold a heavy object above the shoulders.

## **Workplace Violence**

Despite increased security measures and limiting office access to individuals who have a legitimate reason to be on the premises, innocent victims are often involved when estranged spouses, disgruntled former employees or even total strangers with a vendetta show up with an intent to commit harm. Managers and workers must likewise stay sensitive to suspicious mail or packages, phone threats and evidence of any security violations.

## **Collisions**

Opening a door too quickly or turning a corner too fast are the frequent setups for unintended collisions with co-workers. While it may not be with enough force to knock one or the other unconscious, the potential for injury escalates if there are hot liquids, sharp implements or heavy objects involved. Leaving file drawers pulled all the way out is as dangerous at shin level as chin level, especially if a co-worker won't see it until the point of impact.