



SAFETY & LOSS CONTROL NEWS

DECEMBER 2004

HOLIDAY/WINTER SAFETY AT WORK AND AT HOME

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All content created and written by Andrew Taylor unless other sources are cited.

With December comes two additional exposures to hazards. Winter and holidays. This time of year, **electric space heaters** come out of hiding. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and your Office of Insurance and Risk Management are urging caution with the use of these heaters. As with any heating element, they draw more current than other appliances (ever notice your lights dim when you turn your iron on at home?). Check with your building or facility manager prior to using to be sure your electrical circuits can handle the load. Repeated tripping of circuit breakers requires discontinued use. Make sure no combustibles such as papers, curtains, furniture, liquids, or clothing are

within 36 inches of heater. Make sure heater has been tested and approved by the Underwriters Laboratory or other 3rd-party tester. Read owner's manual regarding safe operation. Once in use, monitor cord for overheating - you might be surprised how warm they get. Favor heaters with auto shutoff switches (timed and/or tilted). Unplug heater when not in use, regardless of switch.

Candles introduce another source of ignition to offices this time of year. The NFPA recently cited a 15% increase in candle-caused fires. According to the State Fire Marshal's Office, "the burning of candles and incense is prohibited in state buildings." Consider looking instead of lighting.

Decorations should be of non-flammable material and kept away from any heating elements or candles. Use care not to block means of egress or ingress. Extension cords should be of proper gauge and not create a tripping hazard.

Lighted or other electrified decorations should be turned off after hours and whenever the building will be unoccupied.

Avoid **stress** by recognizing the "4 Fs of Holiday Friction": Fantasies, Family, Food and Finances.

Be extra careful **driving** in winter conditions. More on that in next issue.

Enjoy a safe and happy holiday season!

THE MOST COMMON CAUSE OF INJURY IN DECEMBER

Last December, 30 people within our workforce were injured by slipping, tripping and/or falling. One way to decide what to focus on in the pursuit of injury prevention is to learn from past experience. Specifically, I like to do two things: keep abreast of current activity (near past), and look at what happened "this time last year". Going back even further has value as well, and can provide more statistically sound trends and patterns, but what's happening now is also important. Since many tasks and conditions are seasonal, analyzing last December's injuries may help in preventing injuries this December.

I recently examined records

from last December, as well as injuries entered into the system (to date) for this past month of November. Aside from needle-stick and other exposure related events related to the Medical Center, *slipping, tripping and/or falling injured more employees than anything else.*

In fact, 12 out of the 39 workers' compensation claims reported so far during November involved some sort of problem with walking or standing! In the 42 injuries I looked at, nearly every body part was injured in some way. Eyes and ears were the only parts not mentioned, but they may have been included in several face and head injuries. Everything from toes to

teeth was mentioned!

How can something as simple as walking or standing go so wrong? Something else had to enter the equation and it did. Navigating stairs and wet floors lead the way accounting for 16 of the 42 injuries. Runners-up included uneven elevators, sidewalks and ground; tripping on carpets and rugs; and doing something else while walking such as carrying, mopping and sweeping.

Another interesting fact was that all 12 people injured from slips/trips/falls recorded so far for last month were women. In fact, 34 out of the 42 injuries happened to women! Are women being unfairly targeted by the laws of gravity? - Continued on next page -

DID YOU KNOW?

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION INCLUDES ANSWERING THESE QUESTIONS:

- Who...was injured/involved?
- What...happened?
- When...did it happen?
- Where...did it happen?
- Why...did it happen?
- How...will we prevent it from happening again?
- More on this next month...

COMMON CAUSE - CONTINUED

No, but I did ask a lady at a meeting recently what she thought caused so many people to fall down. She replied that she thought they were mostly women and if so, it was because of long dresses and high heels. She may be right.

Since slips/trips/falls are frequent in December, what can we do now to prevent them?

Wet Floors - Determine source and eliminate or

warn people and keep them off with barriers. Rain is frequently tracked into buildings creating slippery conditions. Monitor entrances and consider floor mats and warning signs.

Stairs - Most people are injured going down stairs. Urge caution. Make sure lighting is adequate. Make sure handrails are in place. Remove all obstacles. If mopping, do so going down stairs, mopping behind as

you go to avoid walking on wet steps.

Elevators - Should be inspected annually. Call repair service any time they do not stop level with floor.

Carrying items - Do not carry things that are too big or too heavy. Get help. Make sure item does not block view.

Outside - Repair uneven sidewalks and fill in or cover holes in ground. Use bar-

riers to keep people away from hazardous conditions until remedied.

Footwear - Promote safety and comfort over fashion. Soft soles are better than hard soles if routinely working in wet conditions. Some workers require extra traction.

Obstacles - Be on the lookout for hoses, cords, wires, damaged carpet, loose rugs, etc.

Let's make this December safer than last!

SAFETY MEETING TOPIC: DRIVING BACKWARDS

Current records indicate that 57% of all vehicle collisions within the universities involve hitting parked cars or backing. The good news is we're having our collisions in parking lots and not the highway. The bad news is that it has cost \$88,875.00 to repair the cars we've backed into and people we've injured in 15 months and that does not count repairing the university vehicles or our own medical costs.

Here are some tips to help make your parking and backing experiences safer:

- Begin with good maintenance. Make sure all lights, including brake lights and backup lights are working so other drivers will be warned of your intentions.
- Where possible, park so that you can drive away forward, without the need to back up.
- In some cases, consider that backing into the parking space may be safer than backing out of it.
- Make sure vehicle is secure by putting gear-shift in "park" or, if standard transmission, reverse or 1st gear.
- Always employ the parking brake.
- Turn front wheels toward curb or side of road. Turn away from curb or side if pointed up hill.
- Do not leave an unattended vehicle with the engine running.
- In the event it becomes necessary to back a vehicle that has been parked, the driver should first walk around the vehicle to check for hidden, unseen, or unnoticed objects, people or animals.
- Be aware that while the vehicle has been still,

the conditions around it may have changed. Larger vehicles may have been replaced by smaller ones, children may have placed toys, bicycles or themselves on the ground behind it, etc.

- If another employee is present, ask them to guide you from outside the vehicle if needed.
- For best visual perspective, place right arm over back of passenger's seat and turn head and torso to the right to look behind you while backing. Steer with left hand. If not possible due to vehicle type or physical limitations, make sure all mirrors are properly adjusted and go slowly.
- Be aware of potential movement of other parked vehicles (look for brake & backup lights). Let them go first.

COLD AND FLU

PREVENTION TIPS:

1. Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough.
2. Wash hands often especially if shaking a lot of hands.
3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
4. Stay home when sick - see a Doctor.
5. Get plenty of sleep, drink plenty of fluids, eat nutritiously.

For more information visit www.cdc.gov/flu

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