Avoiding incidents at work

An incident in an office can be just as painful and costly as an incident in a plant or on a job site. Broken bones are painful and cost as much to treat whether they’re sustained during a fall in the office or a fall in a plant.

In either case, insurance costs, medical and hospital bills and lost wages are involved. Of course, several indirect costs must be added to the direct incident costs, including lost time by co-workers who leave their work areas to help the victim or just to see what is happening, work disruption while a replacement is trained and retraining of the victim if he or she cannot perform a previous job assignment.

Falls are the most common office incident, accounting for the greatest number of disabling injuries. In fact, office workers are twice as likely to suffer a fall as non-office workers.

There are many different reasons why employees fall while on the job. They could fall while walking, climbing ladders and stairs, and even while sitting in chairs. People can trip over telephone and electrical cords, open desk and file drawers, loose or worn carpeting and rugs, debris, and equipment and packages left in aisles “just for a moment.”

In California, an office worker stood up to walk away from her desk and struck her right shinbone on a lower desk drawer that was open about three inches. She was thrown off balance and fell, breaking her left shoulder. She was off work for three months.

Or, if something on top of the stack is needed, an employee may decide to substitute a chair for a ladder. The resulting fall can involve both the employee and the mountain of paper and material. If a wheeled swivel chair serves as the ladder, the fall may be preceded by short flight across the room. Solution: store materials inside cabinets, files and lockers — never on top. Keep the piles neat and labeled. Use a stepstool or ladder to reach top shelves in high cabinets.

Office fires can be as deadly and job-consuming as plant blazes. Know your nearest fire escape route, and where and how to use or activate the fire alarm system and firefighting equipment. Observe strict housekeeping standards and store flammable substances in listed safety containers in locked fireproof cabinets. Matches and smoking material must be confined to approved smoking areas and extinguished before being discarded in proper receptacles.

Office safety is everyone’s responsibility. Everyone should develop an interest in following safe practices both on and off the job and in correcting unsafe conditions.

According to Injury Facts® in 2012, there were more than 227,640 cases of injuries with days away from work and 712 workplace deaths due to contact with objects or equipment. This includes being struck against an object; struck by an object; caught in an object or equipment; or caught in collapsing material.

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