

# Walking the Talk to a Healthier You

by JOE LASKY, JR., CSP, CHMM

**M**Y WIFE AND I have been on just about every diet you can think of in an attempt to beat the “battle of the bulge.” All of these diets have worked great — until we stopped following them! My cardiologist keeps telling me that the best plan to lose weight is the “push-away” diet. In other words, push your plate away from you after one serving of food. In addition to that, he says a minimum of 10,000 steps a day is also an integral part of that plan.

Many of us would agree that the “health” aspect of workplace safety does play a key role in accident prevention. All of us focus every day on maintaining a safe working environment. This should also entail daily or at least weekly fitness-based activities that incorporate all levels of physical fitness (i.e. walking, running, biking, yoga, etc.). Many companies have wellness programs that are available to employees, but usually only on a voluntary basis. It takes a strong personal commitment to follow through on the programs. Without a doubt, a healthy body is less susceptible to injury or disease – which ultimately affects the “safety” aspect of the workplace by reducing potentially unsafe behaviors.

An interesting article entitled “Fit firefighters less prone to injury – study,” published November 15, 2013 in *Reuters Health* found that “fit” people were less prone to minor traumas and recovered more quickly. The researchers of this study concluded that the findings illustrate the importance of fitness in reducing the risk of injury in physically demanding occupations, such as the fire service, and support the need to provide dedicated resources for structural fitness programming and the promotion of injury prevention strategies to people in those fields. This study could easily translate to the physically demanding requirements of the construction industry.

Construction is a physical and fast-paced industry that requires a lot of coordination and awareness, not to mention heavy lifting, working in awkward positions, sitting for long periods of time, and potentially being exposed to toxic substances. To make matters worse, studies often show that unhealthy lifestyles, unsafe work habits, and inappropriate use of technology are causing an increase in health-care costs, worker compensation costs and absenteeism.

Another aspect of wellness is ensuring that you get enough sleep. Lack of proper sleep can lead to reduced productivity, increased on-the-job errors, lack of concentration, fatigue, stress, and rage. One study done by Harvard Medical School in 2012 showed lack of sleep was linked to 274,000 workplace accidents. Other associated diseases/illnesses (i.e. obesity, heart disease, diabetes, etc.) are increasing and adding costs to a company’s bottom line.

While health and fitness is a real concern for many of us, it is difficult to establish a work-based program that meets the diverse needs of a large spectrum of employees. At Scheck worksites, stretching exercises are used in the morning before work begins as a preventative for workplace sprains and strains. This is certainly a good start at incorporating the wellness factor into an existing workplace health and safety program, but there are numerous other ways to achieve this goal. These include, but are not limited to, regularly scheduled exercise; starting out the day with a healthy breakfast; healthy eating habits throughout the

work day; keeping hydrated in hot environments to prevent heat stress; use of adequate sunscreen protection to reduce risk of skin cancer; and yearly visits to your doctor for an annual wellness exam.

At the very least, steps should be taken to reduce employee inactivity, encourage more healthful lifestyle choices, and make overall improvements to benefit employees not just professionally but personally as well. My own personal commitment is to “walk the talk” by exercising more and making more healthful lifestyle choices. Why not join me in making that commitment for yourself as well? Author Darrell Calkins put it this way: “Physical well-being necessitates listening to what you already know and then taking it seriously enough to act accordingly.”

Have a safe and healthy summer! 

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