Prepared by Ron Fouty

Date Issued: June 20, 2006

INCIDENT ALERT

A laborer was tasked with cutting metal pipe imbeds from a concrete structure. The imbeds were at a height that required the worker to bend at the waist while performing the task. He had been working for about 6 hours when he noticed what he thought was some soreness in his abdomen. He notified his supervisor of the symptoms and his supervisor offered to transport him to a nearby medical facility for diagnosis. The worker chose to see his own physician after work, who indicated he had a muscle strain and recommended his activities be changed. The worker immediately returned to restricted duty.

LESSONS LEARNED

Task planning was performed prior to beginning the work however the process did not include an analysis of all the potential ergonomic hazards associated with the job. Ergonomists recommend that work should be positioned so you do not have to constantly bend at the waist. An analysis of this work would have identified that the task could not be repositioned, so thought could have been given to repositioning the worker. A chair or stool that allowed the worker to complete his demolition task in a less awkward position could have been used.

Musculoskeletal disorders remain one of the most costly and longest term injuries suffered in construction. Though regulatory efforts have failed in the past, many good resources and information on preventing these types of injuries are available. One good source of information is the Washington Labor and Industries website, specifically at:

http://lni.wa.gov/Safety/Topics/Ergonomics/ServicesResources/Links/default.asp

It is also important to recognize that the severity of a soft tissue injury can be greatly minimized by prompt medical attention. Recognizing when you are injured is an important step in recovery. Remember that there is a progression of symptoms that may trigger your ability to recognize when you are at risk. They are muscle fatigue, soreness, pain, and injury (in that order). The earlier you treat a symptom, the less likely you will suffer an injury! Additionally, many organizations have discovered the value of implementing a morning and post-break stretching and warm up exercise program. This can have a very positive impact on reducing soft tissue injuries.

Working for long periods in static positions can result in muscle pain. Researchers have found that the ability to take “micro-breaks”, short periods of stretching and changing position, can have a very positive effect and help reduce the potential for soft tissue injuries.
**ACTION ITEMS**

1. Talk with your contractor about their expectations and understanding of the need for job hazard analysis and task planning. Ask how ergonomics are addressed during the task analysis. Ask what their expectations are for training workers in proper body positioning and material handling techniques.

2. Watch for tasks that may result in similar injuries during your walk through. Are people bending at the waist while performing their work? Is the worker standing in static positions for long periods? Have workers developed a task plan for the activity they are engaged in? Does the task plan address ergonomic issues?

3. Share this Incident Alert with your contractor and ask them to share it with their workers.

Distribution:
All CPO Staff