

Director's Column Another Successful Conference!



More than 130 safety, workers' compensation and risk management personnel from across the state recently gathered for

the fourth annual Safety & Loss Control Conference.

The two-day conference, jointly sponsored by Risk Management Division (RMD) and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) Office of the Chancellor, included timely topics on changing Minnesota demographics, distracted driving (see article in this newsletter), developing a workplace stretching program and more. For those who were unable to attend, conference materials are available on the RMD conference website:

<http://www.admin.state.mn.us/risk/Conference/home.html>

If you missed this year's conference, plan to attend next year! The fifth annual Safety & Loss Control Conference is tentatively scheduled for October 25-26, 2011. Conference organizers are already gathering ideas for compelling, provocative and informative topics and presenters for next year. Suggestions can be sent to RMD's Todd Christenson at todd.christenson@state.mn.us or 651-201-3005.

Prescription Savings are Adding Up for State Agencies

Prescriptions account for over 14 percent of the total medical costs for workers' compensation claims, according to the National Council on Compensation Insurance.

Challenges in managing pharmacy costs for workers' compensation claims stem from increased narcotic drug usage for chronic pain, managing multiple medications, low usage of generic brands and coordination among multiple healthcare providers. State agencies can help manage these costs by directing injured employees to the CorVel CCRx program.

State agencies' efforts in 2010 helped achieve a 70 percent increase in the use of the CCRx cards by injured employees. While significant, only 43 percent of all prescriptions today are sent through the CCRx program. That means nearly six in 10 injured employees are missing out on some key benefits of the CorVel CCRx program. Using the CCRx card generates an 8 percent average savings on every prescription filled. Other benefits include the monitoring of duplicate therapies, ensuring the proper timing of refills and managing generic vs. brand name prescription use. For state agency workers' compensation claims using the CCRx cards, generic prescriptions are dispensed at a higher rate than CorVel's national average – an indicator that the program is working.

Agencies can provide injured employees the First Fill letter at the time of a new injury. A copy of the letter is available at:

<http://www.admin.state.mn.us/risk/wc/documents/CorVelCorCareRxFirstFill.pdf>

Using CCRx also makes it easier for the injured employee to obtain medications prescribed by their doctor for their workers' compensation injury. Using a CCRx prescription identification card:

- Eliminates out-of-pocket prescription expenses
- Eliminates the need to request reimbursement for the cost of medications
- Provides access to a large national pharmacy network of providers
- Affords mail order capabilities

CorVel Corporation is the Managed Care Plan provider for the State of Minnesota. For assistance with CorCareRX, call CorVel Corporation at 612-436-2542.



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Hands on the Wheel, Mind on the Road

According to the National Safety Council, 11 percent of drivers can be observed using a handheld cell phone at any given moment. Account for drivers using hands-free phones and the percentage is even higher.

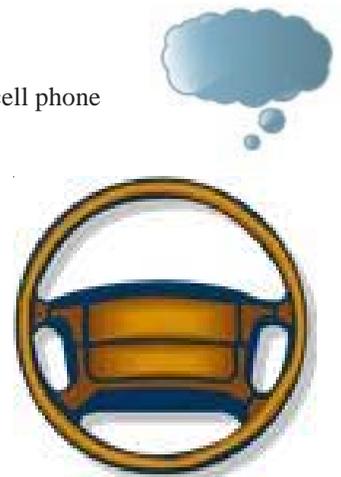
Whether handheld or hands-free, using these devices while driving increases the risk of distraction fourfold, according to epidemiological studies. In fact, says John Ulczycki, who is leading a National Safety Council initiative to save 10,000 lives and prevent 1 million injuries on the nation's roads and highways over five years, more than 50 peer-reviewed research studies confirm substantial negative effects associated with cell phone use and driving, increasing risk not just for those drivers but for everyone on the road.

Ulczycki, speaking at this year's Safety & Loss Control Conference, said the increase in risk is primarily associated with cognitive distraction, or the inability to focus on two issues involving processes of perception, memory, judgment and reasoning at the same time. Cognitive distraction is why the recent proliferation of "hands-free" laws and policies is not resulting in fewer crashes. While the hands are free to be on the wheel, the brain is still distracted. Distracted driving is one of the key strategic focuses spearheading the council's initiative to save lives and reduce injuries. In 2009, the council became the first national organization calling for a ban on all cell phone use by drivers – good advice that employers should heed.

What can employers do? First, Ulczycki said, they should learn more about the issue. Numerous resources are readily available, including the [NSC](#), [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) and [Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#). Links to these resources are available on the RMD website: http://www.admin.state.mn.us/risk/insurance/information.html#Fleet_Safety. Employers should then review existing driving and cell phone use policies and procedures, as well as the organization's culture, to understand employee behavior norms. They should then help employees understand the issue and involve them in the development of new policies and procedures that ban cell phone use while driving. Finally, employers should monitor compliance the same as they would with any safety policy, he added.

Employers can also dispel the common notion that banning cell phone use while driving reduces employee productivity. Ulczycki reported results of an August 2009 survey of National Safety Council member organizations that revealed 99 percent of the companies with cell phone use bans in place reported no decrease in productivity.

For questions about your current fleet safety policy or for assistance on these issues, contact Dave Agren in Risk Management Division at dave.agren@state.mn.us or 651-201-2594.



Defibrillators: Time for New Pads or Battery?

Automated external defibrillators are so common and so simple to use today that sometimes it's easy to overlook simple maintenance.

The Minnesota Safety Council is reminding defibrillator owners that they should check the expiration dates on pads and batteries and change them as necessary. Properly maintaining the devices helps ensure they will operate as intended when they are needed.

More Dirt on Clothes Dryers

The Dirt on Clothes Dryers, featured in the fall 2008 issue of *Alert*, emphasized the importance of inspecting and cleaning clothes dryers to prevent fires. The key points of the article are worth reiterating.

Fires can occur when lint builds up in the dryer or in the exhaust duct. Lint can block airflow, cause excessive heat buildup and result in a fire. Clothes dryer fires have caused considerable damage to state facilities in three separate instances in recent years.

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, the leading cause of fires is the lack of maintenance, primarily from lint build-up in the exhaust system. Each year, dryer-caused fires lead to deaths, injuries and millions of dollars in direct property damage.

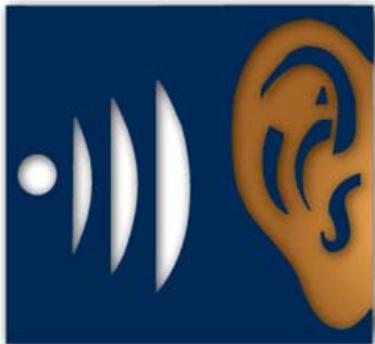


Don Beckering, State Director of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Fire/EMS/Safety Center, compiled the following comprehensive list of best practices for preventing dryer fires.

- Lint screen/filter should be cleaned after each use. Lint is a highly combustible material; lint containing chemical residues can be even more combustible.
- A dryer with an exhaust vent that is 75 percent blocked can elevate the operating temperature by as much as 89 percent. If the normal operating temperature is 300 degrees F, a vent that is 75 percent restricted could increase the temperature to 567 degrees F.
- Check dryers frequently for lint build up outside of the trap. Lint traps miss a significant amount of lint, causing it to build up inside the dryer, dryer vent and even on the heating element.
- Metal vents are preferable and are often required. Plastic/flex-type vents and ducts can melt or ignite.
- Connect metal vent sections with rivets or very short screws. Longer screws that protrude into the vent will catch lint and hinder removal.
- Check outside vents for lint build-up or obstructions.
- Clean vent systems periodically.
- Keep dryer exteriors, adjoining areas and laundry rooms clean and free of lint buildup and clutter.
- Lint infiltrates smoke detectors – dust and/or vacuum smoke detectors frequently to ensure efficient operation and to keep sensors free of debris.
- Never, ever obstruct or block sprinkler heads.
- Fire extinguishers for laundry rooms or areas with clothes dryers should be ABC-rated, which covers burning combustibles, flammable liquids and electrical fires.
- Report and/or repair an improperly working dryer immediately.
- Dryers that do not shut off automatically are unsafe. If the timer is defective or not operating properly, excessive heat will build up in the dryer drum after drying is completed. In some cases, the material in the dryer may burst into flames.
- Carefully read the operation/maintenance manual and follow the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Remove dry items immediately and place in a ventilated area to avoid the potential for spontaneous ignition. Spontaneous ignition is the delayed ignition of solid combustible materials due to an internal heat generation process. For example, spontaneous ignition could occur when cotton cloth materials removed from a hot dryer are stuffed into a bin or hamper. Since there is no ventilation in the hamper and cotton is combustible, the heat generated in the hamper can ignite the materials. This can also occur when dry items remain inside the dryer drum after the cycle is completed. Without a route for heat to escape, the materials can combust.
- Avoid leaving dryers unattended and check them frequently during operation.
- Pay particular attention when drying items that contain hazardous materials or flammable liquids. These materials and liquids can be absorbed by items that are being dried, causing them to ignite.

Incorporating many of these tips into routine activities can help reduce the potential for fire and prevent the loss of life and property.

Can You Hear Me Now?



When it comes to hearing protection, a good rule of thumb is that if you can't carry on a normal conversation with someone three feet away, the environment is likely too noisy. In fact, it may be loud enough to require hearing protection – and possibly a hearing conservation program – for employees working under such conditions. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires a formal hearing conservation program in organizations where employee exposure meets or exceeds an eight-hour average noise level of 85 decibels or greater.

An easy first step in assessing noise levels is a walk-around survey of workplaces. Typical workplaces with elevated noise levels include shops, mechanical rooms and worksites where power tools are used.

The survey should include spot readings with a sound level meter, along with estimates of the duration of the exposure. Sound level monitoring equipment, along with assistance with determining employee exposure to excessive noise levels, are available from Risk Management Division's Safety & Loss Control team.

Spot readings indicating a potential time-weighted average (TWA) exposure in excess of 80 dBA require more thorough monitoring with a personal noise dosimeter. Personal sampling should be conducted for the duration of the noise exposure to determine if exposures are above permissible limits. A TWA exposure at or above 85 dBA requires a hearing conservation program.

For further information regarding OSHA's noise standard and hearing conservation programs, visit RMD's website at www.admin.state.mn.us/risk. For questions or assistance with noise monitoring, contact Jim Kubisiak at james.kubisiak@state.mn.us or 651-201-3016.



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