Background

About MSDs

A Musculoskeletal Disorder (MSD) is an injury or disorder of the musculoskeletal system. This system is made up of:

- Muscles, tendons and tendon sheaths
- Nerves
- Bursa
- Blood vessels
- Joints and spinal discs
- Ligaments

An MSD is most likely to affect the back, shoulders, neck, elbow, hands or wrists. Symptoms include pain, stiffness, swelling, tenderness, tingling or numbness and limited range of motion.

Serious injuries can be avoided by addressing symptoms early. Common MSDs include:

- Back pain
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Epicondylitis (e.g., tennis or golfer’s elbow)
- Muscle strain
- Tension neck syndrome
- Tendonitis (any inflammation of tendons and muscle-tendon junctions)

MSDs can happen when the physical demands of the job are greater than a body can handle. They are often caused by long-term exposure to the following major risk categories:

- Force (e.g., heavy lifting)
- Fixed postures (e.g., sitting or standing all day)
- Awkward postures (e.g., reaching or bending), and

- Repetition (e.g., repeating a motion without rest)

An employee’s risk of developing an MSD is also affected by his or her individual characteristics. People are different in terms of size, strength, endurance, flexibility, etc., and have different levels of tolerance for the physical demands of their work. As well as the physical risk factors, evidence suggests that MSDs increase when the work environment causes employees to feel mental stress or strain.

Preparing for the Safety Talk:

1. Review the background information and materials.
2. Look up any policies or safe operating procedures (SOPs) that are relevant to this topic, or your company’s MSD Prevention Plan. If you do not have written procedures, think about the practices you use.
3. Have employees complete the Body Comfort Survey (included resource).
4. Talk to managers and supervisors to determine if there have been any specific MSD related complaints in the workplace.
5. Review the quick checklist on your Health and Safety Calendar.
7. Make copies of the following handouts for employees:
   a. Company SOPs or MSD Prevention Plan (as identified above)
8. Follow up on any unanswered questions from the last Safety Talk.
Safety Talk Meeting Outline

Follow up on any outstanding safety issues from the previous meeting.

Briefly introduce the topic (in 1-2 minutes) for employees, using ‘About MSDs’ as reference. If appropriate, report on the number of MSD related injuries or hazard reports in your workplace. Share any relevant Napo videos.

**ASK: What can we do to prevent MSDs from happening?**

Discuss the importance of understanding the four risk factors and how they apply to your workplace and the work that your employees are conducting on a day to day basis. Make sure people know how to report MSD Hazards.

**ASK: Where in our workplace MSD hazards most likely to happen? Why?**

Tour the work area and talk about why particular MSD hazards were identified and what they should do to minimize risks. Make sure employees know how to report a hazard that they can’t fix.

Note any hazards that are new or haven’t been addressed by safe operating procedures.

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**Ask: Do you think that it’s possible to prevent all MSDs in our workplace?**

Talk about what it would take to eliminate all MSD injuries. To be successful, everyone would have to take responsibility for working safely and maintaining a safe workplace at all times.

Note any issues that require follow up:

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