**SPRAINS AND STRAINS PREVENTION**

**By Don Milani, ACL Safety Director**

Sprains and Strains are one of the most common work place injuries. These injuries can result in a trip to the doctor and back to work, or they can become a lifelong disability. To start off, let’s talk about the difference between a sprain and a strain. A sprain is a stretching or tearing of ligaments. These are the bands of fibrous tissue that connects one bone to another in your joints. The most common location for a sprain is in your ankle.

A strain is a stretching or tearing of muscle or tendon. This is a fibrous cord of tissue that connects muscles to bones. Strains often occur in the lower back and in the hamstring muscle in the back of the thigh. Symptoms of sprains include: Pain, Swelling, Bruising, Limited ability to move the affected joint, and At the time of injury, you may hear or feel a “pop” in your joint. Symptoms of strains include: Pain, Swelling, Muscle spasms and Limited ability to move the affected muscle.

The causes of sprains are when you overextend or tear a ligament while severly stressing a joint. Sprains occur in the following circumstances: Ankle sprains usually happen while walking on an uneven surface or jumping down off a log or equipment. Knee sprains usually happen when you pivot on the knee during work. A timber faller pivoting to get to his escape path is an example of how this happens. Wrist sprains can happen when you fall and land on an outstretched hand. There can be sprains to other parts of the body also, such as the thumb, arm, upper and lower legs.

There are two types of strains, acute and chronic. Acute strains happen when the muscle stretches too far in an abrupt move, such as falling, slipping, running and jumping, lifting a heavy object, and lifting in an awkward position. Chronic strain results from prolonged, repetitive movement of a muscle. This can be cause by hammering, operating equipment, and running a saw.

Contributing factors to strains and sprains can be: Poor conditioning. Lack of conditioning can leave your muscles weak and more likely to sustain injury. Fatigue. Tired muscles are less likely to provide good support for your joints. When you’re tired, you’re also more likely to succumb to forces that could stress a joint or overextend a muscle. Improper warm-up. Properly warming up before vigorous physical activity loosens your muscles and increases joint range of motion, making the muscles less tight and less prone to trauma and tears.

To minimize chances of sprains, observe the following practices:

Practice good housekeeping.

Avoid strenuous activity when tired or in pain.

Wear appropriate footwear when working on slippery surfaces.

Use caution when walking on uneven surfaces.

When getting out of a vehicle or off equipment, look where you are stepping.

To minimize chances of strains, observe the following practices:

Know how to handle material safely.

Get help to lift or move heavy items.

Lift with your legs and not with your back.

Keep loads in close when moving items.

Do not twist when lifting.

In all cases, developing a stretching program and having the employees stretch every morning will help decrease the potential for strains and sprains. Get involved and help your employees protect themselves from these types of injuries.