



CREATING A HEALTHY WORKPLACE

Thanks to workers' rights and public health movements, workplaces have become dramatically safer places during the last century: According to the National Safety Council, deaths from unintentional work injuries declined 90 percent from 1933 to 1997. However, workers still get hurt and injured on the job and often-times such injuries and deaths are completely preventable. No one should have to unnecessarily risk his or her life or health to make a living.

Additionally, more and more research is showing that investing in workplace wellness programs do reap positive impacts on workers' health and pocketbooks. Such wellness efforts also help employers contain health care costs. It's as simple as this: Prevention makes good business sense.

Did You Know?

- In 2011, more than 4,600 workers died in the United States due to an injury on the job.
- While fatal work injuries declined for white workers in 2011, such injuries rose among Hispanic workers by 3 percent. Fatal work injuries also rose among workers ages 20 to 24 by 18 percent.
- In 2009, about 572,000 violent crimes, such as rape, robbery and assault, happened against people ages 16 and older while they were at work. Also in 2009, more than 500 people were victims of homicide while at work.
- In 2011, musculoskeletal disorders made up 33 percent of all work-related injury and illness cases.
- The cost of obesity among full-time employees tops \$73 billion, which includes the total value of lost productivity and medical costs.
- Research finds that medical costs fall by \$3.27 for every dollar invested in workplace wellness efforts.

What Public Health Teaches Us

Employers start small...

- Understand and follow all workplace safety regulations and best practices. Don't stop at doing the minimum: go beyond Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards.
- Educate employees about workplace safety regulations and train employees to recognize unsafe or unhealthy settings. Depending on your workforce, make sure safety training is available in multiple languages.
- Create a work environment in which workers feel comfortable reporting unsafe work conditions or workplace abuse.
- Provide the required equipment to keep workers safe, such as respiratory gear and hard hats.
- Hold your subcontractors accountable for implementing safety standards and trainings.
- Put in place mechanisms for recognizing and addressing the potential for workplace violence.
- Even our homes can be workplaces. If you employ domestic workers, such as health care aides, nannies or house cleaners, learn what it means to be a responsible employer.
- Practice fire safety drills and prepare your workplace for an unexpected emergency or disaster.
- Take steps to create workplace wellness, such as posting hand-washing reminders, catering meetings with healthy foods or organizing workplace walking groups. Reach out to your local healthy Maine Partnership, they can help (www.healthymainepartnerships.org). Also, if you provide employer-based health insurance, consider certain financial incentives that can improve health, such as incentivizing employees to quit using tobacco.



Think big...

- Wear all personal protective equipment required or recommended for your job.
- Participate in workplace safety trainings and take advantage of workplace wellness efforts, such as flu shot clinics or exercise programs.
- Use your rights to advocate for safe and healthy workplaces: your voice can make all the difference for the workers that come after you.
- Make your support for investments in workplace health and safety known and cite the dramatic progress that equitable public health policies have brought to all workplaces. Write a letter to the editor to your local newspaper or write to your policymakers.
- Invite local policymakers and others to a community roundtable to discuss injury prevention and wellness in the workplace and follow up with specific actions.
- Assist local businesses in preparing for the changes coming via the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The health reform law contains many new changes and opportunities for both employee and employer.