

TOOLBOX TALK #4

PREVENT BACK PAIN

From cases of mild discomfort to severe cases that may be debilitating, many workers have experienced some form of back pain. Knowing how to protect your back and following proper lifting techniques can help prevent this kind of injury.

The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons offers the following tips to help prevent back pain:

- **Exercise.** Combine exercise, such as walking or swimming, with specific exercises to keep the muscles in your back and abdomen strong and flexible.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Being overweight puts added pressure on your spine and lower back.
- **Do not smoke.** Both smoke and nicotine cause your spine to age faster than normal.
- **Maintain proper posture.** Good posture is important to avoiding lower back problems. How you stand, sit and lift objects affects your spine health.

To make sure you practice proper lifting techniques, the Academy recommends you:

- Plan ahead what you want to do. Do not be in a hurry.
- Position yourself close to the object you want to lift.
- Separate your feet shoulder-width apart to give yourself a solid base of support.
- Bend at the knees.
- Tighten your stomach muscles.
- Lift with your leg muscles as you stand up.
- If an object is too heavy or an awkward shape, do not try to lift it by yourself. Ask for help.

