

TOOLBOX TALK #51

KEEPING OLDER WORKERS HEALTHY/PRODUCTIVE

Nearly 20% of the U.S. workforce is older than 65, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. By 2020, 1 in 4 American workers will be older than 55.

Older workers typically have more experience and greater institutional knowledge than younger workers, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) notes. However, their injuries often are more severe and may take longer to heal. Employers should take special considerations into account to help protect older workers.



Injuries and health

Health issues increase with age, and NIOSH data shows the arthritis and hypertension are the two most common health conditions reported by employees older than 55. More than 75% of older workers are estimated to have at least one chronic health condition that requires management.

“The frequency of these conditions and others in older adults has important implications for how and when workers can physically perform their duties,” the agency cautions.

How can employers help keep older workers healthy and safe?

Make the workplace “age-friendly”

Employers and supervisors can follow several strategies to make workplaces more age-friendly, NIOSH states. Among them:

- Be flexible with older workers by giving them a say in their schedule, work tasks and conditions, when possible.
- Let employees work self-paced, and avoid assigning repetitive tasks or work that involved sedentary tasks.
- Require supervisors to take training on managing an aging workforce.
- Provide ergonomically correct tools and equipment.
- Consult with older workers to develop teamwork strategies to help abate age-associated hazards.
- Keep hazards managed – particularly slip, fall and noise hazards, as these can challenge older workers.
- Invest in training to help older workers hone their skills and become comfortable with new technologies.