Body Stressing

What is body stressing?

Body stressing is muscular stress caused by lifting, carrying, twisting and putting down objects and repetitive movements. The risk of body stressing can be higher on an untidy worksite. Some examples of body stressing:

- "I was lifting a bucket of bricks and the handle of the bucket broke and pulled my shoulder and neck."
- "I jarred my back when using a jackhammer to break up concrete, it's been painful since."
- "I stood up quickly and whacked my head on a window frame. I've had neck pain since."

This toolbox talk is intended to help start a health and safety conversation and raise awareness about body stressing. It is not designed as a complete risk management tool for the activity.

A tidy site can help to prevent many unnecessary body stressing injuries.
How do I stop myself hurting my back/spine/shoulder?
• Avoid lifting and carrying heavy or awkward materials: If you have to lift or carry it, get a mate to help
• Avoid twisting when carrying or lifting a heavy load – talk to your teams about proper lifting and carrying techniques
• Reduce the amount of bending and reaching forward
• Use mechanical load shifting devices such as cranes, hoist and hand trucks to move materials around the worksite
• Fit temporary lifting points or handles to heavy or awkward loads.

A tidy site is a safe site
An untidy site can be a cause of body stressing and other accidents such as:
• Tripping over loose objects on floors, stairs and platforms
• Being hit by falling objects
• Slipping on greasy, wet or dirty surfaces
• Hitting against projecting, poorly stacked items or misplaced material
• Cutting, puncturing, or tearing the skin of hands or other body parts on projecting nails, wire or steel strapping.

Research from the Canterbury Safety Charter in 2015 shows a clear correlation between a tidy site and positive health and safety behaviour, with people stating their first impression of a site strongly influenced how they behaved around health and safety.

How do I keep my site tidy and safe?
• Keep walkways, stairs and work areas clear and free from obstructions such as trailing cables, tools, equipment, rubbish and unused materials
• Tidy up as you go
• Put skips where they can be filled easily, and collected safely
• Make sure timber is stacked flat rather than upright, and pallets used to stack materials are in good condition, on firm ground and not leaning
• Remove unwanted materials and construction waste from the worksite so that it does not accumulate
• Make sure work areas are well lit
• Explain to everyone on site the importance of keeping their work area clear and enforce it.

Reinforce these messages to everyone on site:
• Tidy and clean up the site during the day
• Remove materials that you aren’t using or needing
• Inspect the site at the end of the day to make sure the cleanup is complete
• Get a mate to help lift or carry heavy loads.

Employee issues raised:

Date to be resolved by:

This toolbox talk was written with information from WorkSafe New Zealand, ACC and HSE UK. Thank you.