Investing in occupational health "best practices" improves outcomes for injured workers
(from Federal OSHA’s January 2012 newsletter)

A new study of occupational health care in Washington State shows that improving medical care for injured workers can dramatically reduce lost work time. The study is published in the December 2011 issue of the American Public Health Association journal, Medical Care.

Dr. Gary Franklin, medical director for the Washington Department of Labor and Industries, which enforces the state’s occupational safety and health standards, was one of the researchers involved in the study. "Work-related disability is a major public health problem that’s largely overlooked in the U.S.,” Franklin said. "This study shows that using occupational health best practices when treating injured workers can have an important effect on their recovery.”

These "best practices" focus on the safe, healthy return of injured workers to full function and full employment. The study found that injured workers treated by healthcare providers operating under best practices had 19.7 percent fewer disability days than other injured workers receiving treatment, and a reduction in total disability and medical costs of $510 per claim. Workers suffering from back strain had a reduction in disability days of 29.5 percent.


Here’s a related tip from a workers’ compensation specialist at a school district: “As soon as you find out that someone is injured, call the injured employee to find out how he or she is doing. Employees appreciate receiving a call and it makes both communication and their return to work a lot easier: It’s the difference between them being out 30 days and 60 days.”

SASH’s IIPP Template
Having a written Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP) that details how hazards will be identified and controlled, how employees will be communicated with and trained about health and safety on the job, and that describes how accidents will be investigated to identify underlying causes, is an essential first step toward creating a safe and healthful workplace. Don’t forget to check out the SASH IIPP template if you are writing or revising your IIPP. It is a fill-in-the-blank model created in Microsoft Word. Look for it on the CD that came with your binder or download it from www.dir.ca.gov/chswc/SASH.
Although the following article is not specifically related to school health and safety we expect you will find this an interesting and relevant topic.

Occupational Health and Safety Perspectives from the Field: Health and Safety and Green Jobs

Helen Chen and Pam Tau Lee, LOHP

We’ve reached the 21st century and the world of work is changing at a startling pace. As many traditional jobs are being lost, the new economy is ushering in much needed “green jobs.” This offers an unprecedented opportunity to guarantee from the start that these jobs are safe and healthy for both workers and communities. While the term “green job” is still in flux, certain criteria are typically used. First, the job must have a positive impact on the environment and efficiently use natural resources. Second, the job must be economically sustainable. It should pay a living wage that can support a family, provide health care and other benefits, and offer opportunities for advancement. Last, a green job must also promote worker health.

Currently, every 2 ½ seconds, someone is injured or made sick from their job in this country. While going green, we need to build in safety precautions. For example, one of the major sectors of the green jobs revolution — solar panel installation — can be extremely dangerous. Without state-of-the-art fall protection systems and proper worker training, we can expect an increase in fatal falls from roof tops, a hazard that has been identified as a top priority of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA). Later, as buildings with solar panels are demolished, we will see workers exposed to cadmium and other toxic materials unless we plan ahead.

As we develop these new jobs, we need to learn from the past. With the industrial revolution in the 19th century, there was a scourge of worker death and disability from asbestosis, silicosis, brown lung disease, mine cave-ins, and polluting factories. The 20th century saw a computer revolution that brought serious, unanticipated problems for computer users and manufacturers alike.

There was an epidemic of repetitive strain injuries, and problems with toxic chemicals used in electronics manufacturing, affected both high-tech workers and local communities around the world.

Occupational injury and illness rates are already exacting too high a price, both human and monetary. A study by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that the cost to the public for workplace injuries and illness is equal to that of cancer. To ensure that green jobs are safe, we need to anticipate and address potential hazards and involve workers, employers, communities, and enforcement agencies in the effort to ensure that green jobs both provide a decent living and keep workers and communities safe.

SASH Training Schedule – Please help us with publicity!

January 24 — Lake County Office of Education, Lakeport, CA

February 23 — El Dorado County Office of Education, Placerville, CA

March 5 — Compton Unified School District (tentatively scheduled)

April 13 — CASBO conference workshop in San Diego, CA

To register for or help set up a free training in your area, contact Donna Iverson at UCB LOHP, 510-643-8902; Sarah Jacobs at UCLA LOSH, 310-295-8273; or visit our website at www.dir.ca.gov/chswc/sash.