

*Ergonomics***HAND DISORDER SECOND TO BACK INJURIES  
IN EXPENSE, PHYSICAL THERAPY GROUP REPORTS**

Carpal tunnel syndrome, a crippling hand disorder, is second only to back injuries in costs to employers, a Washington-based physical therapy association said in an Oct. 2 release.

According to the Private Practice Section of the American Physical Therapy Association, most cases of the disease could be prevented or alleviated through education or simple workplace modifications.

The group estimated that treatment for workers with carpal tunnel syndrome can cost a company from \$20,000 to \$100,000. A program to teach employees how to avoid developing the disease or how to reduce its symptoms can cost as little as \$40 per worker, according to Minneapolis industrial consultant and physical therapist Glenda L. Key.

Employees in such diverse activities as meat cutting, data processing, grocery checking, and assembly line work can become afflicted with the disease.

Carpal tunnel syndrome, which is caused by repetitive hand motions that compress the hand's median nerve, can result in numbness, weakness, tingling, or burning in the hand.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health estimates that 23,000 workers are afflicted with the disorder every year. Workers with the condition may undergo frequent surgery, miss long periods of work, or lose the use of their hands.

**'Unseen Injury'**

Duluth, Minn., physical therapist and industrial consultant Susan J. Isernhagen called carpal tunnel syndrome an "unseen injury," one that usually progresses undetected until a worker's performance is hampered. Because symptoms of the disease frequently are non-specific, workers may not mention that they have a problem or may try to ignore it, the association said.

Isernhagen asserted that carpal tunnel syndrome is preventable through knowledge. "A little education can go a long way towards avoiding thousands of debilitating injuries and saving millions of dollars," she said.

Key said that although only one level of employees on the organizational rung of the company ladder suffer from the problem, it takes a company-wide prevention and intervention effort to combat carpal tunnel syndrome.

Workers should be alerted to potentially hazardous hand motions and positions and should be trained about less stressful ways to perform tasks, she advised.

Supervisors can play an important role in spotting early warning signs of the disease and stop harmful activities, according to the physical therapists. Design engineers also can prevent problems by taking carpal tunnel syndrome into consideration when making tools or planning work stations, Key said.

**Recommendations**

The association's Private Practice Section recommended that workers take the following precautions to avoid problems with carpal tunnel syndrome:

- ▶ Hold wrists straight when involved in wrist-flexing and -twisting motions that are likely to cause CTS. The use of splints in some cases is suggested to stabilize the wrist.

- ▶ Carry materials in a palms-down grip, which is less stressful than a palms-up grip.

- ▶ Maintain a modified grip when using hand tools to spread pressure over a larger area rather than concentrating pressure at the base of the hand.

- ▶ Avoid wearing clothing or jewelry that constricts the wrist.

The association also said that supervisors who are sensitive to early signs of discomfort may be able to stop the condition before it becomes acute. Possible signs of the onset of carpal tunnel syndrome are extending and fluttering the fingers, shaking the hand, holding one wrist with the other hand, rubbing the wrist, cradling the arm, and using a tool in an incorrect position.

**Hazardous Waste****FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AWARDS 11 GRANTS  
FOR WORKER TRAINING AND EDUCATION PROJECTS**

Fulfilling a mandate of the 1986 Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences announced 11 grant awards totaling close to \$10 million for training and education of workers engaged in hazardous waste removal, containment, and emergency response activities.

NIEHS chose the grant recipients from 78 applications received by the May 1 deadline for the "Superfund Hazardous Waste Worker Health and Safety Training Grants Program." The original field was narrowed to 22 candidates recommended for approval and evaluated on technical merit. A Sept. 1 review resulted in the final 11 applicants for awards, taking into consideration quality of applications, coverage of worker populations, and geographic coverage, according to an NIEHS statement.

The grant program, first announced in January (Current Report, Jan. 14, p. 904), was restricted to non-profit organizations with demonstrated abilities to reach target worker populations and implement training and education programs. The Superfund reauthorization, signed in 1986, included an allocation of up to \$10 million per year for fiscal years 1987-1991 for grants to support training programs for workers and their supervisors.

**Eleven Grant Recipients Named**

Listed below are the grant recipients, the populations targeted for training, other participating organizations involved in the efforts, and the award amounts:

- ▶ International Association of Firefighters, Washington, D.C.; emergency response personnel and first responders nationwide; \$912,123.

- ▶ International Chemical Workers Union, Akron, Ohio; industrial fire brigades and hazardous waste treatment, storage and disposal facility workers; United Steelworkers of America, University of Cincinnati, Greater Cincinnati Occupational Health Center; \$803,749.

- ▶ International Union of Operating Engineers, Washington, D.C.; operating engineers engaged in hazardous waste operations; \$1,118,657.

- ▶ Laborers-AGC Education and Training Fund, Pomfret Center, Conn.; laborers engaged in hazardous waste cleanup; \$1,987,820.

- ▶ Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, Lakewood, Colo.; hazardous waste treatment, storage and disposal facility workers; \$687,348.

- ▶ Seattle Fire Department, Seattle, Wash.; emergency response personnel and first responders; Washington State Fire Training Service; \$217,502.

- ▶ University of Alabama Center for Labor Education and Research, Birmingham, Ala.; heavy equipment operators.

laborers, waste transportation workers, and governmental personnel involved with hazardous waste sites; Deep South Educational Resource Center; \$406,006.

► University of California Institute of Industrial Relations, Los Angeles, Calif.; Superfund site workers, state/county emergency response personnel, waste transportation personnel, and waste site assessment personnel; University of California at Berkeley Labor Occupational Health Program, university extension programs at UCLA, Davis and Irvine campuses, University of Southern California Continuing Education Program, Los Angeles Committee on Occupational Safety and Health; \$803,935.

► University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio; waste dump site workers and supervisors, treatment, storage and disposal workers, emergency response personnel, and waste transporters; Southeast Michigan Coalition on Occupational Safety and Health, Greater Cincinnati Occupational Health Center, universities of Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan, Wisconsin, Murray State, Michigan State, and Purdue; \$1,527,038.

► University of Lowell Research Foundation, Lowell, Mass.; waste site cleanup workers, emergency response personnel, treatment, storage and disposal facility workers, and waste transporters; Boston University School of Public Health, Harvard Educational Resource Center, Tufts University Center for Environmental Management, Yale University Occupational Medicine Program, Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health, Maine Labor Group for Health, Connecticut Committee for Occupational Safety and Health, Rhode Island Committee for Occupational Safety and Health; \$765,300.

► University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, Piscataway, N.J.; waste cleanup site workers and supervisors, site assessment personnel, waste treatment, storage and disposal facility workers, and waste transporters; New Jersey Department of Labor, Hunter College School of Health Sciences, Empire State College, State University of New York, New York Committee for Occupational Health and Safety, American Red Cross, Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union Local 8-149; \$713,382.

### Variations

#### OSHA ANNOUNCES DATE, LOCATION FOR HEARING ON INTERSTATE LEAD MEDICAL REMOVAL REQUEST

A hearing on Interstate Lead Co.'s request for an extension of its temporary variance from provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's lead standard will be held Dec. 1 in Birmingham, Ala., according to an Oct. 20 announcement from the agency (52 FR 38976).

The hearing is set to begin at 9:30 a.m. in the Birmingham Room at the Southeastern Program Service Center, 2001 12th Ave. North, Birmingham, Ala. 35285.

Presiding at the hearing will be Quentin P. McColgin, Office of Administrative Law Judges, Heritage Plaza, Suite 530, 111 Veterans Memorial Blvd., Metairie, La. 70005.

Interstate Lead Co., a secondary lead smelter and refiner, requested in August that OSHA extend a temporary variance allowing the company to abide by less stringent phases of medical removal triggers (Current Report, Aug. 19, p. 487).

Under the lead standard at 29 CFR 1910.1025(k) employers are required to remove from work any employee whose blood tests average at or above 50 micrograms of lead per 100 grams of blood. Employees removed from work under this section must remain in temporary medical removal until their blood lead levels have returned to or below the medical removal trigger of 40 µg/100g.

### Previous Requests Denied

Previous requests for temporary variances from that section of the standard had been granted by the agency, but in October 1985 OSHA declined to grant further relief to the lead industry employers from removal and return triggers. Following additional requests from two secondary smelters in August, the agency agreed to accept comments and to hold public hearings on the issue.

Requests to participate in the hearing must be filed in duplicate with James J. Concannon, director, Office of Variance Determination, Room N-3653, OSHA, U.S. Department of Labor, 200 Constitution Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20210; and Nahum Litt, chief administrative law judge, U.S. Department of Labor, Vanguard Building, Suite 700, 1111 20th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

### Litigation

#### RAYMARK FILES SUITS IN 12 STATES ALLEGING SETTLEMENT BASED ON FRAUD

Suits filed by Raymark Industries Inc. in 12 states seeking to rescind a \$15 million settlement with tire workers allegedly suffering from asbestos-related diseases lack factual foundation and represent an attempt by the company to put plaintiffs in the tire workers litigation project in a defensive posture, a California attorney coordinating the project told BNA Oct. 8.

*Raymark Industries Inc. v. Stemple*, filed in late September under the federal Racketeering, Influence, and Corrupt Organizations Act, sought recovery of a \$15 million settlement Raymark paid to 5,000 tire workers based on the firm's allegations that medical examinations conducted under the direction of plaintiffs' counsels were fraudulent (Current Report, Aug. 5, p. 408).

Raymark alleged that two California attorneys, three medical doctors, and others conspired to obtain money from the company by filing "phony or inadequate" medical diagnoses. The diagnoses showed that tire workers examined were suffering from asbestos-related disease. Settlements amounting to \$42 million, involving another 15,000 workers represented by other attorneys, are unaffected by the suits.

The attorneys and the doctors allegedly organized a consortium of lawyers to "utilize the false and misleading medical documentation ... and thereafter to submit or threaten to litigate false or frivolous claims on behalf of said tire workers," according to the suits.

Raymark would not comment on the litigation.

#### Suits Called 'Inaccurate and Groundless'

"I consider these lawsuits to be factually inaccurate and groundless," Gordon A. Stemple, of Stemple & Boyajian in Century City, Calif., told BNA. "This is primarily an effort by Raymark and others to divert time and resources away from identifying victims [of asbestos exposure] and to put attorneys and plaintiffs in a defensive posture in 12 different states. Obviously, they've already had some success."

Stemple said the company is attempting through the suits to thwart medical screening of tire workers that the litigation project has been conducting throughout the United States because the project is revealing "a lot of sick people" with potential claims against the company.

Calling the lawsuits a "foolish and bold move" by a company that has indicated it may file for protection from its creditors under the federal bankruptcy code, Stemple said the factual allegations in the suits involve issues about which reasonable minds can disagree or which are untrue.