TOOLBOX TALK:

Soft Tissue Injury Prevention

I. Introduction

Overarching Aim: To improve musculoskeletal health through working solutions and building a communication infrastructure.

Toolbox Talk Goals:

1. Motivate workers to plan work to reduce overexertion hazards.
2. To provide information about overexertion hazards and common working solutions.

Learning Objectives:

- Describe common overexertion hazards and working solutions on the worksite
- Explain how working solutions can be incorporated into everyday tasks

I'm here today to lead a discussion focused on understanding and preventing soft tissue injuries. This is designed to help you plan for health and safety in order to improve your health now and protect it in the long term. The goal is to help you improve your musculoskeletal health by taking the following actions:

1. Recognizing overexertion hazards
2. Using working solutions to protect your body

Construction is a tough and physically demanding job, so it's very important to protect your body so that you're able to do your job well today and keep working tomorrow. It's also about planning for safety and modifying how you do work to prevent the small injuries and pain that add up so you can enjoy your life outside the job site and when you retire.

In this toolbox talk, we'll discuss:

1. Ways in which you can overexert and injure yourself while at work
2. Working solutions to prevent overexertion injuries
3. How to prevent soft tissue injuries through communicating with fellow workers, foremen, and managers

Let's start today by talking a little more about soft tissue injury prevention and working solutions.

II. Icebreaker Discussion Questions

- After a hard day's work on-site, where on your body do you feel the most pain?
- What are some of the tasks you do that put a strain on your body?
- What is it about those tasks that cause you to overexert yourself? (ex. awkward postures repetitive motions, heavy material handling)

Construction is a very physically demanding job, but there are ways to modify the work you do to make these tasks easier on your body. As you know, small pains and injuries can add up over your career to cause more significant health problems later in life. The small changes you make now may make a big difference in reducing your risk for injuries later.

The great news is you are probably already using some of these working solutions to reduce strain on your body. We want to talk about what you're already doing, and how you can use more of these solutions more often. You all know the work better than anyone, so please share solutions you've used or have seen.

III. Overexertion Hazards Content

There are 3 main categories of work practices where the risk of overexertion is most likely to occur: when you are moving materials around the site, working over your head, and groundwork.

(Encourage discussion and worker participation. Allow the safety manager to interject with examples relevant to the current work on the worksite.)

1. **Manual materials handling** is probably the most common task on a construction site across trades, and what we really want you to focus on. This includes lifting, carrying, holding, pushing, or pulling heavy or bulky materials. It can stress your back and shoulders if you are carrying heavy and bulky items for long distances, or are stooping to lift items, or carrying them over your shoulders. This can put you at risk of developing soft tissue injuries.
    a. How can you modify these kinds of tasks? [examples include:]
        i. Carry objects between shoulders and knees ("strike zone")
        ii. Use rolling carts or dollies whenever possible; use hand grips for carrying heavy objects
        iii. Use 2 people to carry heavy objects (usually greater than 50 pounds)
        iv. If possible, store materials at a convenient height off the ground and close to your workstation.
2. **Overhead work** is another common area where overexertion occurs. When doing tasks like drilling/driving fasteners/finishing drywall, you can stress your neck and shoulders, especially if you are holding tools above shoulder height.
    a. How can you change your set-up of these kinds of tasks so that you can prevent overexertion?
        i. Use drill and screw gun extensions that let you hold the tool at waist or shoulder level rather than above your head
        ii. Use a lift/ladder/scaffolding/baker staging to move closer to the work
        iii. Limit the time you spend doing overhead work without breaks

3. **Groundwork**, such as installing and finishing floors requires you to stoop, squat, bend, and kneel, often for long periods of time, and can cause stress on your body. Who here does this work—and how does it affect your body? [possible responses: low back pain - more if twisting; knee pain]
    a. There are solutions that can reduce the stress on your back and knees or reduce the amount of time you're working on the task. How could you modify this task?

i. When possible, raise the work to waist height using tables or sawhorses. Again, keeping things in the “strike zone.”
ii. When possible, use tools with extension handles that let you stand when doing a floor-level task.
iii. Use knee pads
iv. Take breaks or rotate jobs

Keep these three categories in mind while you work: material handling, overhead work, and groundwork. By modifying how you do these tasks, you’ll be doing a lot to prevent pain and injury that could last you much longer than the task you’re working on.

As you can see, you're using lots of working solutions on the worksite already. Now, you have the knowledge to apply this thinking to more tasks and to help your co-workers work smarter too.

IV. Communicating to Prevent Soft Tissue Injury

Working conditions can play a direct role in causing job stress. In addition to staying well-informed about the best ways to prevent overexertion, you can promote healthy working practices through communication with your co-workers and supervisors. For example, if you see a co-worker performing a task in a way you know to be unsafe, don't be afraid to offer some constructive criticism. Conversely, if a co-worker approaches you with some specific safety advice, take his/her feedback into consideration for future tasks rather than perceiving this as a personal put-down of your own safety practices. It is vital to communicate with other workers, foremen, and managers to discuss potential risks of injury and ideas for how to modify work tasks to minimize these risks. Safety conversations like these make your work environment safer and more conducive to teamwork.

You now have some simple solutions for preventing injury - utilize them by working together as a team to make changes that will protect you and others on the work site.

VI. Conclusion

Please take note of the various resources related to injury prevention we have provided (on the toolbox talk cards). If you have any questions about what we discussed today, please reach out to the safety manager or foreman.

Are there any questions? Thanks for your time!

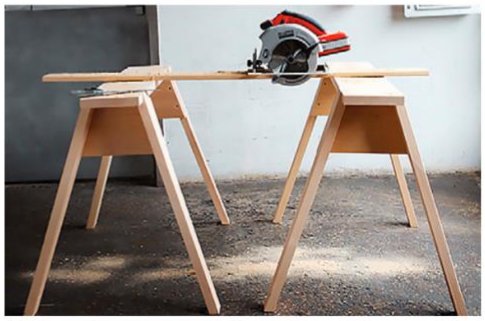
Plan for soft-tissue INJURY PREVENTION

TRY TO KEEP YOUR WORK IN THE "STRIKE ZONE"!

Lift yourself closer to your work.

Store materials off of the ground.

ARM
All the Right Moves



Bring your work up off the ground.

ARM
All the Right Moves

RESOURCES to prevent injuries

Check out these resources to help stay safe and injury-free:

Simple Solutions for Home Building Workers: A Basic Guide for Preventing Manual Material Handling Injuries
www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2013-111/pdfs/2013-111.pdf
Booklet from CDC and NIOSH about practices and equipment to help new and experienced workers, contractors, and builders prevent manual material handling injuries.

Ergonomic Guidelines for Manual Material Handling
www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2007-131/pdfs/2007-131.pdf?id=10.26616/NIOSHPUB2007131
Solutions from the CDC, NIOSH, and the CA Department of Industrial Relations for how to manually carry containers and ways to lower, fill, or empty containers without getting injured.

Simple Solutions: Ergonomics for Construction Workers
www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2007-122/pdfs/2007-122.pdf?id=10.26616/NIOSHPUB2007122
Solutions for floor and ground level work; overhead work; lifting, holding, and handling materials; hard/intensive work; and how to deal with specific behaviors that put you at risk for soft-tissue injury, such as stooping.

Sprains and Strains Prevention Toolbox Safety Talk
www.workzonesafety.org/files/documents/training/toolbox_talks/osha_alliance/sprains_strains_prevention.pdf
Simple guide from OSHA with simple and quick reminders on how to avoid sprains and strains.

ARM All the Right Moves