



TDCJ Risk Management's *Training Circular*

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Risk Management Issues

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WORKPLACE SAFETY



Safety in the workplace. What exactly does this mean and how can it be achieved? Health and safety experts agree that safety is a collaborative effort by both employer and employee. It's the individual's responsibility to identify and report health and safety issues within the workplace and it's the employer's responsibility to provide a healthy and safe place in which to work. However, achieving and maintaining workplace safety is largely dependent on your work environment. In a workplace as diverse as the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), varying levels of personal safety may exist for employees.

For instance, a correctional officer walking the run of an Administrative Segregation wing on a high security unit would have much different safety concerns than a clerk working in an administrative office void of offenders. For the correctional officer, putting on a thrust vest when reporting to shift is innate,

whereas if the clerk showed up to work wearing a thrust vest, his/her coworkers would likely clear the office. This level of precaution just isn't warranted for the office worker. Both staff members, do however, share the individual responsibility of ensuring their personal safety by identifying and reporting workplace hazards. The TDCJ ensures staff safety by providing staff and offenders with agency policy, procedures and training. The agency takes safety a step further by providing specialized training to staff whose job assignments require unique skill sets (i.e. annual in-service training).

The TDCJ is a very diverse organization. The agency has the administration inherent of a large corporate organization and also successfully operates various industrial, agricultural, mechanical, service and production programs. This is in addition to its primary function of being a penal institution. These facets com-

bined make the TDCJ arguably the most unique of state agencies. It is this uniqueness that presents one of the greatest challenges to the agency— workplace safety.

Statistically Speaking:

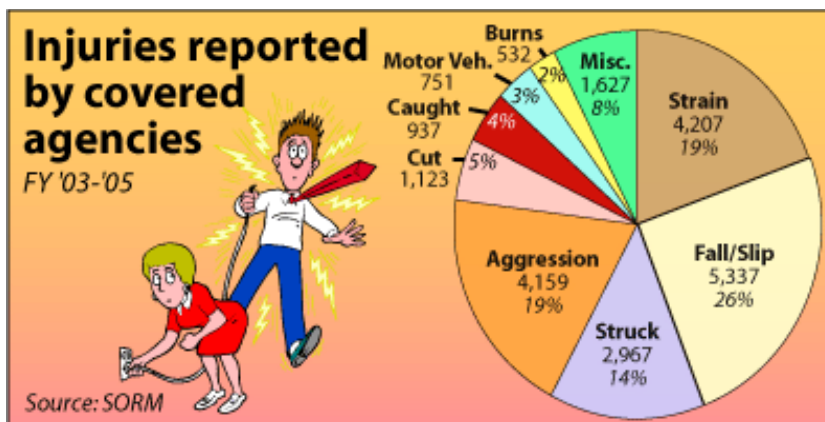
The TDCJ has a daily average offender population of over 150,000 and nearly 25,000 correctional staff. With an approximate 6:1 ratio of offenders to uniformed security staff, one would expect offender assaults on employees to be the leading cause of employee injuries. It's not. It's not even second! TDCJ Risk Management statistics for fiscal year 2006 show that slips, trips & falls and struck by/against injuries accounted for more than twice the number of offender assaults on staff. There were 1007 slips, trips or falls; 1004 struck by or against; and 959 staff assaults reported in FY06. Slips, trips & falls and being struck by or against injuries accounted for 42% of all reported employee injuries during this period.

Statewide, slips, trips and falls continue to be the most reported and costly of workplace injuries. The State Office of Risk Management (SORM) reports that of all workplace injuries, more than a quarter of them are either a slip, trip or fall.

and the employee falls injuring themselves. They have taken an unsafe condition and turned it into an unsafe act. Remember, safety is an individual responsibility.

Another example: an employee pushing a cart through an open crash gate accidentally gouges

familiar with their environment, they are usually headed for a fall—pun intended. Staff performing repetitive work are especially susceptible to incurring injury because they tend to put themselves on 'mental cruise control.' Have you ever heard someone say, "I can do that job with my eyes closed." If you think about it, the person whose says that is proclaiming they are too complacent to do that job safely. If you ever find yourself thinking that you can perform your job without really having to think about it, it's probably time to ask for a new job assignment or switch to another shift card. If neither of these are options, then step back from your job and reassess how you are doing it. Is there a better way. A safer way?



Break it down:

All injuries fall into one of two categories: unsafe act; unsafe condition.

An **unsafe act** is the direct result of an employee action.

An **unsafe condition** is any physical state that results in a reduced degree of safety normally present.

Can one lead to the other? Sure it can! And it often does! For example, an employee notices a loose ladder rung in a perimeter picket but chooses to climb the ladder anyway. The loose ladder rung gives way

the gate post with the cart but does not report it. The next employee to pass through the gate cuts their hand on the gouged metal gatepost. This is a situation where an unsafe act by one employee presented an unsafe condition for another employee. The lesson to be learned here is that your actions have consequences for not only you but your coworkers as well.

Although not palatable, statistics prove time and again that most workplace injuries are direct results of unsafe employee actions. When people become complacent and too

Tips for accident prevention:

- * Clean up spills immediately.
- * Wear appropriate footwear for the job.
- * Slow down!
- * Show up for work alert and clear minded.
- * Encourage others to work safely, that your safety depends on their safety.
- * Look at the AD-10.20 log to see if you've discovered items not already reported.
- * Walk your workspace and

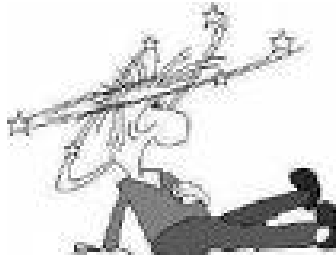
inspect it for health and safety hazards—report any that you find.

- * Don't fall into the mindset, "*It ain't my job*" Safety is everybody's job!
- * Meet with your Risk Manager to discuss safety issues and ideas.
- * Remind yourself and others that taking shortcuts is not an option.
- * Use the right tool for the job—a chair is not a stepstool and a stepstool is not a chair.
- * Finally, Listen to your gut instinct—if it doesn't feel safe, it's probably not!

Help's a phone call away:

All units and most off-unit locations have assigned maintenance departments and risk managers. Leased spaces usually have a contact person for maintenance and health & safety issues. A function of this staff is to help correct unsafe working conditions. Find out who (and how) to notify and what the procedures are for reporting hazards in your particular workplace before the need arises.

Remember, when you discover an unsafe condition, report it! Your coworkers are depending on you. Inform your supervisor of the unsafe condition. Stop your Risk Manager and let them know.



If you experience difficulty resolving any health or safety issue in your workplace, please contact your nearest Risk Management office. These numbers can be found on the agency website as well as in the Forvus mainframe system phone directory.

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Debbie Liles
Director, Administrative Review and Risk
Management

John Dunphy
Program Administrator
Risk Management

Doug Odom
Audit & Inspection Manager
Risk Management

David Scholwinski
Operations Manager
Risk Management

The *Training Circular*, a publication of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Risk Management Department, is published monthly in effort to promote and enhance risk management awareness on issues relating to TDCJ employees. Design and layout of the *Training Circular* is performed by David Scholwinski, Operations Manager, Risk Management. Comments, suggestions and safety related items are welcome. Send Suggestions to:

David Scholwinski
Risk Management Department
1060 hwy 190 east
Huntsville, Texas 77340
or,
david.scholwinski@tdcj.texas.gov

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