

# Southern California Trade Contractors Association

## Quarterly Safety Newsletter

4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 2017

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### Back Injuries – U.S. #1 Safety Problem

Back injuries are a significant cost driver for school districts. They often result from overexertion, typically resulting from an injury sustained from lifting, pulling, pushing, and carrying an object—an injury classified as a sprain or strain.

Injuries come from grounds workers lifting and lowering mowing equipment off trucks, employees lifting special needs students who have fallen or lifting/lowering them to and from wheelchairs, nutrition services workers who retrieve food containers from bottom shelves multiple times a day, or custodians who are injured from emptying trash cans in the cafeteria. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, work related musculoskeletal disorders (WWSDs), including back injuries, account for more than one out of every three work-related injuries in the United States.

As back injuries continue to rise, efforts are made to train employees in proper lifting techniques to reduce the frequency and severity of these injuries, especially in maintenance and operations, custodial, grounds work, food services, child development centers and special education. Recommendations on safe lifting and are some practical ways to make all lifting activities safer have followed these concerns.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health researched this topic and offered recommended weight limits and a calculator to estimate a “safe” lift. This information can be found at [www.cdc.gov/niosh](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh).

As basic starting point, one person should be able to lift an object weighing up to 51 pounds:

- If the object is within 7 inches from the front of his or her body
- If the object is at waist height and directly in front of the person
- If there is no twisting involved
- If there is a handle on the object
- If the load inside doesn't shift once lifted

If any of the conditions listed above is not met, then the load would be considered “unsafe”, and modifications must be made to make it a “safe” lift.

In order to make it a safe lift:

- The weight of the load must be decreased, or
- It needs to be a “two-person” lift, or
- Mechanical assistance must be used (dolly, cart, lift, etc.)

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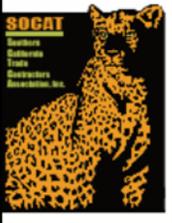
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### Construction Jobs Increase in 42 states between December 2016 and December 2017; 32 States & D.C. add jobs between November & December

California & Nevada have biggest job gains for the year, Iowa and Missouri have largest declines; California and Montana add the most jobs for the month while New Jersey loses the most jobs.

Forty-two states added construction jobs between December 2016 and 2017, while 32 states and the District of Columbia added construction jobs between November and December, according to an analysis by the Associated General Contractors of America of labor Department data released today. Association officials said a new federal infrastructure measure would help guarantee continued employment gains in the sector.

"Construction employment is expanding in many parts of the country in large part because of strong private-sector demand," said Ken Simonson, the associate's chief economist. "Any new public-sector investments, particularly for infrastructure projects, would help accelerate job gains in many parts of the country."

California added the most construction jobs (56,000 jobs, 7.1 percent) during the past year. Other states adding a high number of new construction jobs for the past 12 months include Florida (43,900 jobs, 9.1 percent); Texas (27,900 jobs, 4.0 percent); Pennsylvania (13,100 jobs, 5.4 percent) and Washington (11,500 jobs, 6.0 percent). Nevada (12.8 percent, 10,400 jobs) added the highest percentage of new construction jobs during the past year, followed by Rhode Island (11.3 percent, 2,100 jobs); Oklahoma (10.7 percent, 8,200 jobs); Oregon (10.5 percent, 10,000 jobs) and Alaska (9.7 percent, 1,500 jobs).

Eight states shed construction jobs between December 2016 and December 2017 while construction employment was unchanged in the District of Columbia. Missouri lost the highest number of construction jobs followed by Iowa, North Carolina, and Connecticut.

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### Reducing Lifting Exposures

Reducing exposures for any type of injury that a change be made to the job task or work environment to achieve a positive outcome. This might include different tools or equipment to make the job easier, alternating the work process or flow to allow more breaks (recovery), or training employees on better ways to lift. CAL/OSHA's regulation, 5110, details three control methods for reducing motion injuries.

Engineering controls: These would include physical changes or modifications to the workstations, tools, or equipment to make the job safer. Typically, engineering controls require an out-of-pocket budgetary commitment but have the highest rate of success for creating a safer work environment. Examples include:

- Using truck ramps on grounds crews' trucks that can be used to remove the mower and edger more safely than lifting them off the truck
- Purchasing smaller trash cans in cafeterias to create smaller loads
- Longer handles on equipment that would eliminate poor back postures while working, or raising the height of a work surface to reduce the amount of forward bending as employees work on materials

Administrative controls: Rather than purchase new products, tools, or equipment, administrative controls focus on reducing the exposure time with lifting hazards. Administrative controls might include a "work hardening" program for jobs that require intense lifting, job rotation to give the back a rest period, expanding the job duties of the worker to reduce repetitive lifting, etc. These types of controls do not have the success rate allowed through engineering controls but, instead, offer ways to prevent a fatigue-related injury or accident. For example;

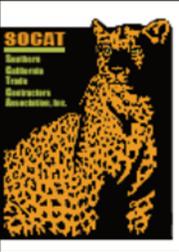
- Offer a work hardening program for employees returning to work following an injury, or for all new hires, in order to condition them slowly into the job. Many custodians are injured during intense summers cleaning activities. A work hardening program may be a good administrative control to slowly condition their backs muscles for the heavy-duty summer months of cleaning.
- Another option would be to expand the job of warehouse workers to include some paperwork or housekeeping duties with less lifting to allow for a work-related recovery period from repetitive lifting.
- Cross-training employees so workers can rotate between jobs requiring intense lifting activities with jobs that do not require this.

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Among the 32 states and the District of Columbia that added construction jobs between November and December, California added more than any other state (7,000 jobs, 0.8 percent), followed by Minnesota (5,700 jobs, 4.7 percent); Pennsylvania (4,800 jobs, 1.9 percent); Florida (4,600 jobs, 0.9 percent) and Texas (4,300 jobs, 0.6 percent). Montana had added the highest percentage of construction jobs for the month (5.5 percent, 1,500 jobs), followed by Minnesota; Oklahoma (3.5 percent, 2,900 jobs); Alaska (3.0 percent, 500 jobs) and Wyoming (3.0 percent, 600 jobs).

Association officials said the best way to ensure construction employment continues to expand is for Congress and the administration to work together to enact new infrastructure investments. They noted that, according to a sector survey the association released earlier this month, many firms appear to be counting on new federal infrastructure funding as they plan to expand headcount this year.

For more information visit  
<https://www.agc.org/news/2018/01/23/construction-spending-post-soild-monthly>

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### Preventing Back Injuries

Carrying, lifting, pushing, pulling and other manual material handling operations present significant potential for employee injury. Most back injuries that occur on the job are a result of poor lifting techniques. Manual lifting and carrying of objects should be designed out of jobs whenever possible. When manual lifting cannot be eliminated, completion of the following simple steps will assist in reducing back injuries.

### Review the Work Tasks

If work requires continuous material handling or heavy lifting, post-job offer employment physicals, strength testing, as well as physical conditioning and stretching programs and lifting training will ensure that workers are physically fit and knowledgeable on how avoid back injuries.

### Inspect Work Areas

Slips and falls cause many back injuries. Make sure that floors are not wet or slippery, housekeeping practices are acceptable, and all stairs, handrails and walking surfaces are properly maintained. Any substandard conditions observed should be corrected in order to reduce the chance of injury.

### Lift with Your Legs

The leg muscles are much stronger than the back muscles. Lift with your legs, not your back. Keep your back straight, the load close to your body and get a grasp with both hands. Lift gradually-do not jerk. Avoid twisting when carrying a heavy load.

### Get Help

Do not try to carry too bulky or too heavy a load. Workers who try to move heavy objects without assistance can exceed their limitations and injure themselves. Ideally, workers should be of approximately the same size for team lifting. One individual needs to be responsible for control of the action to ensure proper coordination. If one worker lifts too soon, shifts the load, or lowers it improperly, either the worker or the person assisting may be injured.

*This bulletin is intended only as a reminder and is offered solely as a guide to assist management in its responsibility of providing a safer working environment. This bullet is not intended to cover all possible hazardous conditions or unsafe acts that may exist. Other unsafe acts or hazardous conditions should also be noted and corrective action taken.*