2009 Looking Forward

According to Douglas Gaylord, the NCCCS Safety and Workers Compensation Analyst, there were 120 workers’ compensation claims from the community colleges totaling $518,920.00 for the period July 1 – November 30, 2008. Fifty-three percent of these claims were associated with slips, trips, and falls, the topic of a recent EHSI quarterly training session. “This is an area we really have to get a handle on,” according to Mr. Gaylord. He suggests inspection of sidewalks and parking lots since some of the injuries have been the result of stepping in potholes, tripping over curbs, and tripping over buckled sidewalks due to tree roots.

Also, in the latest OSHA news the final rule on Clarification of Employers’ Duty to Provide Personal Protective Equipment and Train Each Employee was published in the Federal Register on December 12, 2008. This rule states that for employers to be in compliance, they must provide personal protective equipment (PPE) and hazards training for each employee covered by the standards requiring PPE. Acting Assistant Secretary of Labor for OSHA Thomas M. Stohler states that “By making this change, those few employers who egregiously violate the OSHA PPE standards can be held fully accountable for violations affecting each employee who is not provided proper PPE.”

If you’re wondering where OSHA is focusing efforts this year, a recent federal report states that their industry areas of emphasis will include landscaping and commercial and institution building construction, among others. Fatality hazard areas of emphasis will include fall from elevation, trenching, struck by powered industrial vehicle, and electrical. Certainly there is no lack of such challenges on our campuses, and we’ll have to remain vigilant in these and other areas. As always EHSI is happy to guide you in the right direction. We look forward to another safe and rewarding year of service to our sister institutions in NCCCS.

OSHA Regulatory Update

A Look Back at 2008 and a Glance into the Future

OSHA’s directive is to ensure employers provide a hazard-free workplace, and they accomplish their mission largely by implementing and enforcing health and safety rules. On the enforcement side of the house, 2008 was a banner year—the agency exceeded its goals by catching more criminals, conducting more inspections and issuing more citations than expected. On the implementation side there was not much to write home about. No new standards were born. There were just some minor growing pains.

Last Year

Electrical Standard Near the beginning of 2007, OSHA published a major revision to its electrical standard found in 29 CFR 1910.302 – 1910.308. It focused on safety in the design and installation of electric equipment in the workplace and codified dozens of new requirements. The agency followed up with a notice in October of last year in which they corrected some typographical errors, further clarified the scope of the standard, and provided answers to some questions on the application of the rules.

Personal Protective Equipment When it comes to conditions warranting the use of personal protective equipment OSHA has two basic requirements: that it must be used and that training be provided. Subpart I of 29 CFR 1910 is the gathering place for the use and training requirements for all types of PPE, except for
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respirators. Because of the variety of situations which necessitate the use of a respirator, their rules are sprinkled over different sections of 29 CFR; the language in these different sections that pertains to training is not identical which has led some to question whether or not PPE training was, in fact, mandatory.

In a somewhat related matter, OSHA’s approach to enforcing the PPE standard had been called into question. Specifically, questions had arisen about whether multiple PPE violations encountered at facility during a single compliance inspection could be grouped into a single violation. (From an offending facility’s perspective it would be the silver lining to a dark cloud because it would mean a less substantial penalty.)

OSHA addressed both of these questions in December. They revised the regulatory language to bring consistency to the various respirator training provisions. The bottom line is that there is no option: training is always required before an employee uses any type of PPE. They also affirmed that every PPE violation—whether it be due to the absence of its use or the lack of training—will be cited separately and not aggregated. The bottom line is that OSHA is aiming at a company’s bottom line to emphasize their perspective it would be the silver lining to a dark cloud because it would mean a less substantial penalty.)

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The Future

OSHA will be concentrating its efforts for new and improved regulations in four areas that are applicable to community colleges: hazard communication; slip, trip and fall hazards; power presses; and emergency response.

Hazard Communication Standard. The Hazard Communication Standard protects people using hazardous chemicals in the U.S. Analogous standards mandating the documentation and dissemination of hazard information have been implemented by many other countries. While these rules have had positive effects within each country, their collective impact has created an ever-increasing burden on those who export and import regulated chemicals.

GHS Label for a Carcinogen

In an effort to ease this pain, the United Nations began promoting a single international standard: the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals, or GHS. Nations around the world have begun the process of incorporating the GHS into their regulatory framework, and OSHA intends to modify the Hazard Communication Standard to make it consistent with GHS requirements.

This would lead to new rules for classifying health and physical hazards, for labeling containers, and that standardize material safety data sheets.

Slips, Trips and Falls The regulations that eliminate slip, trip and fall hazards have prevented the downfall of many a person for nearly 40 years, yet these types of mishaps continue to result in an alarming number of workplace injuries and fatalities. Consequently, OSHA is in the process of formulating revisions that they believe will substantially reduce the number of deaths and amount of lost time. As currently envisioned, the changes will update some requirements to reflect advances in technology, consolidate and simplify other requirements, eliminate ambiguities and redundancies, and add new fall protection equipment design and performance requirements.

Mechanical Power Presses OSHA’s mechanical power press standard—also known as the machine guarding standard—was developed in 1971. Since then it has been the recipient of only minor tweaks. Until now OSHA is in the process of punching out a major revision to this rule. If it comes off the drawing board as planned the overhaul will not only incorporate the latest guarding techniques but its scope will be broadened to cover hydraulic and pneumatic power presses.

Emergency Response and Preparedness

Requirements aimed at protecting emergency response personnel are peppered throughout the health and safety regulations. OSHA is concerned about this fragmentation; they are also concerned that the current patchwork of rules may not address the full range of hazards facing persons who provide emergency response services. This could lead to a new standard that unites and updates requirements addressing PPE, training and qualifications, medical monitoring, safety management, and program documentation.

What to Do if a Fluorescent Light Bulb Breaks

Fluorescent light bulbs contain a very small amount of mercury sealed within the glass tubing. EPA recommends the following clean-up and disposal guidelines:

- Open a window and leave the room for 15 minutes or more. Carefully scoop up the fragments and powder with stiff

paper or cardboard and place them in a sealed plastic bag.

- Use disposable rubber gloves, if available (i.e., do not use bare hands).

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Don’t Forget About Office Safety

Many occupations at community colleges can be described as business type jobs in an office environment. Often these employees believe they work in a safe area, removed from hazards like you would find in the woodworking, welding, or automotive shops. But there are unique hazards in the office workplace that can become safety issues as well.

Falling is the most common office accident. Falls can occur when you lean too far while sitting in your chair. Don’t laugh, this really happens. Carrying objects that limit your ability to see obstacles in your path can result in tripping and falling. Workers should never stand on chairs and desks to reach high objects. Extension cords should only be used temporarily, and they should be taped down or enclosed in a rubber passageway to prevent trips. Also, electric cords should never be placed under rugs or carpet. Although that may prevent a trip hazard, any damage to the wire’s insulation may go undetected and it may become a fire hazard.

Lifting can cause strain injuries. After sitting at a desk for a long period, it is easy to strain by lifting something heavy with “cold” muscles. Always get help and use proper lifting techniques, such as bending your knees and lifting with your legs. Other injuries may occur when objects are dropped on your feet. Be cautious when opening drawers to make sure they don’t pull all the way out of the cabinet. Make sure items don’t fall off carts as they are being moved. Employees can be struck by someone else opening a door in their path.

Common office tools can be sharp and cause cuts. Careless use of staplers, pens, scissors, and letter openers can cause injuries. Be especially cautious when using a paper cutter. Never distract someone else while they are using a paper cutter either. Keep hair, fingers, clothing, and jewelry clear of the paper shredder. Always unplug the shredder when clearing a jam.

Keep the copier cover closed when making copies; the UV light can be hazardous to your vision. Be careful when you are clearing a paper jam in the copy machine. Burns are possible when working near the hot parts inside the copier cabinet.

Most people practice extra caution when using stairs, but falls can occur when you are distracted by talking or reading when using stairs. The OSHA standards state that enclosed stairways more than four risers high and 44 inches wide are required to have one handrail, more than 44 inches wide must have a handrail on both sides, and if wider than 88 inches it must have an intermediate rail. A stairway must have a rail on any open side, regardless of width. With all these regulations regarding handrails, it must be a good idea to use them. Stairways and hallways should be kept uncluttered and well lit. Emergency lights should be inspected on a regular schedule.

Emergency exit routes should be posted in every building and evacuation drills should be practiced. As you are sitting at your desk right now, do you know the location of the nearest fire extinguisher, fire alarm station, and the primary and secondary exits? Do you know where the nearest first-aid kit is located? Take time to find this out now so you will be prepared in case of an emergency.
Basics of Workers’ Compensation Class at Blue Ridge CC

Each year in North Carolina Community Colleges, thousands of dollars that would otherwise be spent on teacher salaries or new programs are allocated to pay workers’ compensation costs. These costs could be reduced or eliminated by taking advantage of safety training programs and safety inspections and by understanding the ins and outs of Workers’ Compensation. While accident prevention is obviously the preferred method of eliminating compensation costs, understanding Workers’ Comp can prevent costly mistakes and ill will with uninjured as well as injured employees. On Friday, April 3, 2009, John Ogletree will be teaching an eight-hour class at Blue Ridge Community College that is designed to give participants useful information to better understand and manage Workers’ Compensation Claims. The class, titled “Basics of Workers’ Compensation,” will be beneficial to employees who are responsible for filing compensation claims at their college. Take back control of your college’s Workers’ Comp costs by attending “Basics of Workers’ Compensation” at BRCC on Friday, April 3, 2009 from 8 am until 5 pm. Full-time community college employees interested in attending can take advantage of their free class if they haven’t already done so this semester. For anyone else who would like to attend this valuable one-day seminar, the cost is only $50. To register please contact Ruth Kidd at 828-694-1767 or ruthk@blueridge.edu.

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Workers’ Compensation Class
Where? Blue Ridge Community College
When? Friday, April 3, 2009 8am-5pm
Cost? Free to most full-time community college employees
For more information, contact Ruth Kidd (828-694-1767 or ruthk@blueridge.edu)

Submissions
If you would like to write an article or have an idea for one, Safety Measures would like to hear from you. Please contact Chuck Arrowood or any of the EHSI staff.

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