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### **Five Common Workplace Injuries...Do They Occur in Your Workplace?**

What is the phrase of choice most often heard when an injury occurs? Is it “Ouch! Shoot!” (or maybe some other phrase you would rather not mention)? Yelling out in pain, or even complaining about the pain is a common reaction for the injured employee when the accident happens. For an employer, it might not be physical pain that is the most bothersome, but rather it is the frustration and impact a workplace injury can have on production, costs and the culture that can send anyone screaming. The [Indiana Workers’ Compensation Information Portal](#) (IWCIP) warns employers that back injuries, stress fractures, carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS), traumatic brain injury (TBI) and toxic mold are some of the most common workplace injuries and health hazards that occur. Employees and employers may feel the effects of these injuries for days, months or even a lifetime.

These injuries often evade the common eye or appear mild, which could lead to delayed treatment. Putting off treatment, like putting off any problem, may only make it worse and could lead to decreased productivity, lost workdays and expensive medical care, all of which can hurt an employer. The most common culprit for employee pain is back injuries, according to IWCIP, and even simple motions, like improper lifting of a heavy box, can result in a back injury. The [National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Strokes](#) (NINDS) lists symptoms ranging from muscle ache, shooting pain, limited flexibility to an inability to stand up straight. This all adds up to a whopping **\$50 billion spent annually on back pain for Americans** according to the NINDS. Even a pre-existing back condition aggravated by an employee’s current duties (pointed out by the IWCIP) may qualify for work comp benefits. Though this sure can pack a punch, the next injury may occur in the back or in any bone in the body.

For many of us, we know all too well what a broken bone feels like. Now imagine cracks and breaks occurring from daily activities. Some employees experience tiny cracks in their bones, called stress fractures, when overuse or repetitive use of a muscle causes fatigue and the muscle cannot absorb the added shock, according to the [Mayo Clinic](#). A physically demanding job, such as one in the construction field, can put employees at a higher risk for stress fractures (especially in the weight bearing bones, like the legs and feet). The Mayo Clinic states symptoms may include swelling and continued pain, which can develop into chronic pain that may require the use of opioids (painkillers). **Painkillers account for 25-40 percent of work comp prescription dollars**, according to [MyMatrix](#), who specializes in patient care and health care cost control. This tiny little crack can do some serious damage to employees and work comp dollars. Another injury that evades the naked eye and plagues employees is Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS). If the first two injuries described above did not make you squirm, maybe CTS will.

CTS progressively attacks the hands and arms causing severe pain. It occurs when a tiny nerve in the wrist becomes pinched, according to the [Mayo Clinic](#). This tiny pinched nerve can produce burning, tingling or numbness in the fingers, difficulty gripping or making a fist and the dropping of objects. IWCIP

lists CTS as the **largest contributing factor to lost time at work**. That is right; this little nerve is responsible for more lost production time than any other workplace injury. Therefore, jobs requiring repetitive wrist use, such as assembly lines or vibrating tools should be aware of this little culprit. The Mayo Clinic advises that wrist splints or anti-inflammatory may help. This next injury directly affects the eight pounds of body above the neck - the head.

Some of us may have experienced some type of blow to the head. These brain injuries, called traumatic brain injuries (TBI), occur when any alteration in brain function takes place. The [Brain Injury Association of America](#) (BIA) warns that even a mild injury to the head can result in a concussion, prolonged amnesia and even death. The next time an employee experiences a jolt to the head, remember it can significantly affect cognitive, physical and psychological skills. The effects of TBI vary by person and may not be apparent for years after the injury. The [National Conference of State Legislatures \(who recently studied TBI\) reported that TBI costs an estimated \\$60 billion annually](#). Introducing simple safety measure, like hard hats, can help reduce the effects of TBI. So far, we have mentioned cracks, strains and blows to the body, but this next workplace hazard attacks employees differently and has been called the “new asbestos.”

When speaking of toxic molds (no we are not talking about the green- glob-creatures found in children’s cartoons,) we are talking about hidden mold that attacks the internal organs. The IWCIP explains that toxic molds can create health risks, healthcare costs and lawsuits comparable to the asbestos period. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists that](#) several molds, including cladosporium and aspergillus, can cause upper respiratory tract symptoms, cough and wheezing in otherwise healthy people. Installing proper ventilation, using mold-killing products and reducing humidity to between 40 to 60 percent can help eliminate the threat of toxic mold. **Hundreds of millions of dollars have been awarded to claimants** in toxic mold cases, according to [Risk Management Magazine](#). This silent attacker does not play favorites and may be a risk to employees, customer s and visitors of the workplace.

Employers and employees need to take a proactive approach to safety training and prevention(unless you enjoy the pain, shouting and missed work). Recognizing these common injuries is the first step in prevention. Though the above injuries may be listed as common, they do not have to occur. The [Indiana Occupation Safety and Health Administration](#) (IOSHA) works with employers and employees to change workplace culture and increase employer and worker awareness of, commitment to and involvement in workplace safety and health. Private organizations can also provide unique solutions to safety and health hazards. Remember, early detection and prevention of safety and health risks can save lives, money and prevent agony for both employees and employers.

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