

The SASH Connection

This is the third edition of the *SASH Connection*. This newsletter is for you—SASH Coordinators—who have gone through the SASH Program’s free training and are now serving as health and safety resources for your school district.

In this edition we discuss how to make workplace health and safety committees effective. We also present the data on back belts — do they help or hurt you?

We continue to solicit your involvement in this newsletter. Please send us your questions, challenges, successes and/or suggestions that might benefit other districts.

Remember, it takes everyone, working together, to create a safe workplace!

Making Your District’s Health and Safety Committee a Success!

A health and safety committee can be a very effective mechanism for sharing the responsibility for safety. There are a variety of activities committees can do.

They can:

- Review injury data, accident reports, and workers’ compensation records.
- Conduct regular inspections.
- Design and conduct health and safety surveys of employees and supervisors
- Collect and review Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs)
- Propose and evaluate various ways to improve safety conditions
- Establish or improve procedures for employees to report safety hazards
- Educate workers and supervisors on health and safety issues
- Plan and organize training programs for workers, supervisors, and managers
- Investigate accidents, assessing underlying causes of the incidents
- Review the district’s Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP).

But who should be on your committee and how do you keep members interested? Here are some tips for keeping safety committees engaged:

1. Include representatives from all departments, including management and union members.
2. Provide training on health and safety to committee members.
3. Have clear goals and a purpose that is agreed upon by all members.
4. Develop meeting agendas jointly with employees and management and send them out to everyone in advance.
5. Demonstrate management commitment by providing adequate resources and by encouraging people with authority to attend meetings.
6. Keep track of action items and follow-up on tasks.
7. Publicize the committee’s successes.
8. Let committee members know they are appreciated and that their input and opinions are important!

Take Our Survey! – Tell us your successes and challenges

The SASH Program is conducting a survey to find out what health and safety changes SASH Coordinators are making back in their districts. We are conducting this survey to find out whether California’s SASH Program can serve as a model for other states. Please help us out by completing the very simple 6 questions in the online questionnaire. To complete the survey, click on [Take the Survey](#) in the email Donna Iverson will be sending you soon.

Thank you for your help! And, good luck with all your efforts to improve school employee health and safety.

Back Belts Are Not Effective in Reducing Back Injuries



Back belts don't reduce the forces on the spine

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)*, back belts provide a minimal reduction in compressive force and do not significantly reduce the risk of injury. Some research has found the highest compressive and shearing forces in the spine occur when wearing a belt.

Back belts don't reduce the strain on muscles, tendons and ligaments

There is substantial evidence that demonstrates the 'lack of effect' of back belts in reducing the degree of strain on associated muscles, tendons and ligaments or the risk of musculoskeletal injuries to the back, associated with manual handling tasks. It has been found that belts do not change the activity levels of spinal muscles in any posture.

Back belts do nothing to reduce fatigue or to increase the ability to lift

Wearing a back belt has no effect on muscle fatigue or the maximum weight able to be lifted. Therefore using back belts cannot be endorsed for minimizing back muscle fatigue or increasing available lifting force. In fact, there is a danger that using a belt may encourage the lifting of increased weights if the user wrongly thinks they have increased lifting ability.

Back belts are like holding your breath when lifting

Studies have shown that wearing a back belt has a similar effect on the abdominal muscles to holding your breath. This causes increased pressure on the abdominal muscles which can lead to stiff and exaggerated postures. These postures may increase the potential for injury.

* Go to www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/94-127 for more info about the study.

Back belts can increase blood pressure and breathing rate

One study found that diastolic blood pressure increased significantly during the lifting when wearing a back belt. Researchers also found an increased rate of respiration when subjects wore back belts during physically demanding tasks. Increased blood pressure and rate of respiration can increase the risk of heart attacks in susceptible people.

Back belts don't reduce the change of injury or reduce back pain

A 1994 NIOSH study found no evidence that back belts actually reduce the risk of worker injuries. Further research in 2000 showed again there was no evidence that using back belts (either by requirement or individual choice) reduced the incidence of back pain or back injury claims. A study of the retail industry showed no differences in injury rates between workers who did or did not wear belts.

Back braces can be useful after an injury

Where damage has occurred, back braces may be prescribed by treating doctors or physiotherapists. This is designed to restrict the wearer's movements during the recovery phase or for long term prevention of further damage.

In summary, there is little scientific evidence of increased lifting power or lower rates of injury in workers wearing back belts. There is however, some evidence of potential harm from increased abdominal and blood pressure.

from – WorkSafe Victoria

SASH Training Schedule – Please help us with publicity!

- **April 26, 2011** at Imperial County Office of Education in El Centro (Imperial Co.)
- **May 4, 2011** at ASCIP Headquarters in Cerritos (Los Angeles Co.)
- **May 12, 2011** in Marin County Office of Education (Marin Co.)

To register for or help set up a free training program in your area, contact Donna Iverson at UCB LOHP, 510-643-8902; or Sarah Jacobs at UCLA LOSH, 310-295-8273; or visit our website at www.dir.ca.gov/chswc/sash.