The "C-Change" Initiative:

1. Change behaviors.
2. Challenge ourselves to re-think how we work.
3. Certify the results on a daily basis.

Tool Box Talk

Week of February 14th, 2011

In our last installment we defined soft tissue injuries and now we will discuss how we can prevent such injuries. A very common soft tissue injury is a sprain. It is an injury to a ligament by a force that stretches all or some of the fibers beyond their elastic limit causing them to rupture. These sprains can be caused by a single traumatic event such as a fall or due to repetitive overload. We commonly see sprains occur in ankles, wrists, and knees. In order to prevent sprains resulting from falls we need to make sure our work areas are clear of tripping hazards such as tools, hoses, cords, welding leads, and materials that put us at risk for such falls. We also need to ensure that our walkways are free of obstructions and those areas around ladders are clear. In the winter months snow and ice must be addressed to prevent injury. We need to make sure that our work areas have adequate lighting in order to see potential hazards. If we are carrying any items that obstruct our vision, we put ourselves at risk for falls. We need to use carts or hand trucks to move material safely. When we leave safe work surfaces and stand on piping, scaffold midrails or equipment to perform our jobs, we put ourselves at risk for falls. We need to communicate effectively with the carpenters who build our scaffolds to put us in the proper position to perform our jobs safely and efficiently. We also have control over selecting the right tool for the job and avoiding unsafe practices, such as double wrenching or using cheaters that put us at risk for falls and injuries. When we offload trucks at our job sites we need to use a ladder and not jump off the bed of the vehicle which sets us up for knee injuries.

When we are involved in repetitive activities that put us at risk for soft tissue injuries there are things that we can do to limit the stresses that are placed on the body. We can rotate workers in a crew to decrease overuse symptoms. We must use proper body mechanics that will allow us to perform our job safely and effectively. Other factors that can help us avoid these injuries are performing warm-up and stretching activities prior to physical work. General warm-up consists of 5 to 10 minutes of physical activity that makes us break a sweat. If you drop a rubber band in a glass of ice cold water, then pull it out and stretch it, it will snap very easily. If you put a rubber band in a glass of warm water, it will become more elastic and stretch further. Our joints and soft tissues are like the rubber band; they are more elastic and less likely to be injured when they are warm. Once you are sufficiently warmed up and your muscles are more elastic is when stretching is more effective.