



Safety Scene

Finding Time for Fitness

by Molly E. Butz

The benefits of regular exercise may surprise you!

May is, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), National Physical Fitness and Sports Month. Moreover, May 20, 2009 is National Employee Fitness & Health Day. So although Safety Scene often focuses on specific hazards as they relate to steel and wood component manufacturing, this month it seems appropriate to encourage discussion about a health issue that affects everyone at your facility: basic physical fitness.

Exercise, even a moderate amount, is good for us. To begin with, exercise can improve cardiovascular health, help you sleep better or even result in dropping a little excess weight, all of which will help you feel (and look) better. Exercise can also lower your stress level, increase stamina and boost your mood.

All of those benefits translate to the workplace as well. Exercise can contribute to consistent employee attendance and increased productivity. In addition, it stands to reason that healthier employees will help decrease the company's health care costs and have fewer injuries and illnesses. With that in mind, it makes sense to spend a little time this month talking with your employees about health and fitness, and if possible, provide them with access to as much information as possible.

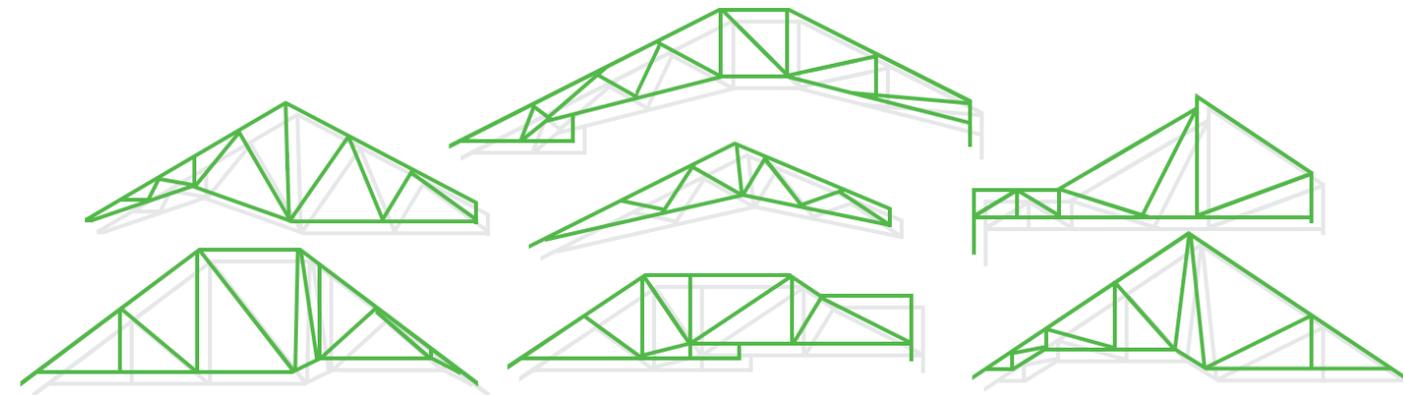
There are plenty of free and inexpensive ways to provide positive, reputable information to your employees. Consider posting some simple wellness snippets on bulletin boards and in restrooms in your facility. If you'd like to take it a little further, create a brief "wellness newsletter" to distribute to your staff. Not sure where to start? Use a website like Google to search for interesting tips and articles using phrases like "benefits of exercise," "fitness tricks" and "health tips."

If it's feasible, implement a few things at the office to promote better health like bike racks for people who want to ride to work, a shower/small locker room for folks that need to freshen up before work or a "wellness library" of books and other resources on various health and fitness topics. If a whole library seems overwhelming, there are numerous online "libraries" you can suggest or even make available during breaks including: www.wellnessproposals.com, www.mayoclinic.com, meriter.staywellsolutionsonline.com/library/wellness/ and wellnesscenter.meridianhealth.com/Library/Wellness/.

Contact a local fitness center and ask if they have any corporate programs; many places offer special packages that include discounted rates, incentive packages and special programs for your employees. You may also find that your insurance provider offers kick-backs and/or discounts for people that take part in health and wellness activities such as attending Weight Watchers® meetings, taking yoga classes or joining a health club. Often times you can request speakers from local groups and businesses to present for little or no fees. Check out organizations like the American Cancer Society and Red Cross or tap a local nutritionist's or doctor's office for a knowledgeable professional. If you're hesitant because you're afraid it might take too much time, invite the speaker to present during your typical safety training timeslot.

No matter how you go about it, May is the perfect time to talk to your group about health and fitness. This is an easy opportunity to help your staff get into better shape and, in return, gain a healthier more productive workforce. Safety (and health) first! **SBC**

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at a glance

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