

## **Back Up Your Back Safety Program with Feedback on Safe Lifting**

Making sure employees lift safely and avoid back injuries is an ongoing process. Good training supplemented by frequent feedback is a winning combination.

Let's say there's this workplace that is experiencing a high rate of back injuries. The safety manager knows that most of the injuries are a result of unsafe lifting.

The company has held safety meetings on lifting, run a back safety awareness campaign, put up posters around the workplace to remind workers about safe lifting technique, and conducted annual safety training sessions.

And still the high rate of back injuries. What to do?

One day the safety manager is walking through the plant, and he sees Kenny, a new employee, lifting a heavy box incorrectly. Instead of bending his knees and lifting with his back, Kenny's bending at the waist, knees locked, putting a lot of unnecessary pressure on his lower back. Kenny is a back injury waiting to happen. Maybe you've got a "Kenny" or "Kendra" or two in your workplace.

Anyway, the safety manager goes up to Kenny and says, "Hey, Kenny, I'm concerned you're going to hurt your back if you keep lifting that way. If you bend your knees and power the lift with your legs like this (he demonstrates), you'll save your back."

Kenny says, "Yeah, I heard that in the training session. But, you know, I've always done it this way, and I've never injured my back."

"Well, not yet," says the safety manager. "But if you keep doing that, I'm afraid you'll end up in a lot of pain one of these days. Remember what Mary went through with her back injury. She was out of work for weeks and is still in pain."

There's a flicker in Kenny's eyes that says he's heard.

A couple of days later when the safety manager sees Kenny lifting correctly, he says, "Good job! You're lifting safely and protecting your back. Way to go!"

If the safety manager, Kenny's supervisor, and his co-workers keep reinforcing that safe behavior, pretty soon Kenny's always going to be lifting safely. Safe behavior will have become a habit.