Prevention is a powerful concept when applied to workplace safety and health. Most successful programs for injury and illness prevention include elements that focus on finding all hazards in the workplace and developing a plan for preventing and controlling those hazards.

In 2012, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) updated the Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems Standard (OHSMS) ANSI-Z-10.1 This is a consensus standard for continual improvement of safety and health programs. This standard lays out the blueprint for improving health and safety performance in your organization while increasing productivity, financial performance and quality. Sections include Leadership and Employee Participation; Planning, Implementation and Operation; Evaluation and Corrective Action; and Management Review.

Employees who are exposed to this proactive process soon realize that safety and health are not just the buzzwords of management programs. They begin to understand that workplace safety is the product of a successful business and vice versa. The benefits continue as long as employers and others remain proactive in eliminating workplace hazards before they cause injuries or worse.

The studies also highlight important characteristics of effective programs, including management commitment and leadership, effective employee participation, integration of health and safety with business planning, and continuous program evaluation. Prevention programs without these features are not as effective.

The literature on injury and illness prevention programs also includes numerous studies that attempt to identify the critical success features associated with superior health and safety performance. Liu et al. [2010] examined the effectiveness of Pennsylvania’s voluntary program that provides workers’ compensation premium discounts to employers that establish joint labor-management safety committees.2 Gallagher et al. [2001] and Anderson et al. [2010] also concluded that management commitment and employee involvement are the keys to the program’s success.3,4 All managers and employees are responsible for maintaining a safe and healthy workplace. Everyone works cooperatively, shows ownership for the program, and is committed to preventing injuries, illnesses, and fatalities.5 Figure 1 shows the top benefits of workplace safety programs, as cited by financial decision makers.6

![Figure 1. Top Benefits of Workplace Safety Programs Cited by Financial Decisionmakers](chart)

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A Glimpse at the Burden, Need, and Impact Approach Toward MSDs

More than 20 million workers in the wholesale and retail trade (WRT) sector are at risk for fatal and nonfatal injuries. In 2014, approximately 650,000 workers were injured while performing their jobs,1 and 463 fatalities occurred in the WRT sector.2 Approximately 60% of injuries were severe enough to require days away from work, job transfer, or work restriction. The overall number of injuries and fatalities may be attributed to certain types of high-risk workplaces: general merchandise stores, food and beverage stores, motor vehicle and parts dealers, and stores for building/gardening materials and supplies. Many of the fatalities occurred in retail gas stations and convenience stores, which often employ young and inexperienced workers. To provide a baseline to judge future prevention efforts, the WRT Program leadership produced the Chartbook: Injuries, Illnesses, and Fatalities in Wholesale and Retail Trade in 2005.

The Burden of MSDs

MSD injuries are costly. A recent study estimated the average cost per case from all MSD cases in all NORA sectors at $7,775 in 2004 dollars.3 Adjusted to 2014 dollars, the average cost of MSDs in the WRT sector is estimated at $9,743 per case. Using the BLS estimate of approximately 63,000 reported cases of MSDs in 2014 yields a total cost of $596 million in the WRT sector. MSDs have a large economic impact on society, including the cost of treatment and the related indirect costs of productivity losses. Workers, their families, employers, and tax payers share this burden.

The Needs Related to MSDs

Until the NIOSH WRT Program was created in 2006, there was little published information on hazards, risks, and morbidity and mortality in the WRT sector. There is still a need for continuing assessment, as well as organized efforts to intervene in and address the greatest hazards and risks. NIOSH is uniquely positioned to make a difference in the health and safety of workers in WRT because of the partnerships it has developed.

The Impact of MSDs

NIOSH is the leading U.S. federal entity investigating the causes of MSDs and back injury. Its tradition of cutting-edge research and publishing is valued by both public and private professional organizations and underlies the evidence-based approach to subsequent interventions designed to prevent MSDs.

To find previous editions, go to https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/programs/wrt/resources/bulletins.html.

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