



# City Safe

A Guide To Assist In Training  
Employees About:

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## ***YOUR AGING WORKFORCE***

Number 26

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*City Safe is a publication of the League of Kansas Municipalities and the Kansas Municipal Insurance Trust for the purpose of educating and informing cities about loss control methods and risk management. Contents herein are not intended to provide specific legal or medical advice. Readers should seek advice on specific concerns from a qualified professional.*

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We all realize that our workforce continues to age each and every year. However, most of us do not recognize that as our workers age, the manner in which they work also changes.

At the National Council of Self Insurers' annual meeting in Las Vegas, Buz Minor of the law firm of Vorys, Sater in Columbus, OH, spoke about the challenges that older employees present to the workers' compensation system. The following is a summary of Mr. Minor's comments.

The face of the American workforce is changing; there are more laugh lines around the eyes and worry lines around the mouth. Simply put, the American workforce is aging and will continue to age. In the last decade or so, the supply of younger workers (age 20-34) actually shrunk by six million while the number of Americans over 50 grew by double that number. Experts predict a 40 percent increase in older workers by the year 2012. An older workforce presents challenges and opportunities for American employers. However, in order to take advantages and to minimize the challenges, employers must be aware of the changes brought on by the aging process and how those changes affect the workplace.

It is obvious to anyone on the seasoned side of 50 that there are irreversible physical changes that accompany the aging process. Visual acuity and visual discrimination change. The ability to hear is diminished, particularly where there is a level of background noise. The older worker's strength decreases and his reaction time slows. Joints lose their flexibility and older workers are more likely to be hampered by arthritic and other degenerative changes. Even the sense of touch and smell are diminished.



Cognitively, the older worker makes decisions that are at least as sound as he ever did, and maybe better. However, it often takes him longer to reach the result. He learns at a different pace. He tends to be more set in his ways and change does not come as comfortably as it once did.

He learns in different ways than he did when he was younger and the training materials and curricula that might be effective for the younger worker might not be for the older worker.

In examining the workplace for hazards, the changes that are part of the aging process must be kept in mind. For example, as the worker ages he loses much of his elasticity in his joints as degenerative changes emerge. The older worker who is asked to perform tasks working overhead is prone to develop shoulder problems. Any discussion of ergonomics needs to be particularly mindful of the older worker. We also know that while the older workers experience fewer injuries, the debilitating effect of an injury mirrors the older worker's loss of strength and the diminished flexibility in the older body. Put more simply, it takes the older worker longer to recover. Thus, the return to work programs need to factor in the differences between the younger and older worker. Many experts argue that employers should implement physical conditioning programs for their employees, emphasizing both strengthening and flexibility. Others suggest that employers at least assist employees in such efforts by helping pay the cost for a health and fitness club or by having an on-site facility.



In addition to planning return to work programs and establishing basic ergonomic programs that take into account the needs of the older worker, effective managers will identify those hazards that are presented by the changes in the workforce. For example, falls are the most frequent and most difficult problem for older Americans. If the older worker's visual acuity is diminished, then areas where there are fall hazards need to be better lit, better identified, better marked, and better protected, such as with more effective railing.



Managers should also recognize the differences between older workers and younger workers when implementing new job processes or establishing training programs. The data exists and demonstrates the differences in how older and younger Americans learn and retain information. A casual look at reading lists for 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 12<sup>th</sup> graders, college students, and graduate students demonstrates a hierarchy geared toward the capabilities of the readers. If we know that there are keys to learning that aid the older worker, we would be foolish not to incorporate those keys into our training programs.

Finally, the older worker brings with him a particular set of concerns and anxieties. Often the older worker has family demands placed on him as a result of having aging and ailing parents or spouse. He might be supporting not only his immediate family, but also his parents and/

or in-laws. Retirement, working through the complexities of Social Security or other insurance programs and dealing with medical problems, can all be distractions for the older worker. The employer who recognizes these distractions and implements assistance programs to help the older worker cope with the distractions not only works toward having a more productive worker, but a genuinely appreciative one.

*The article above was reprinted with permission from the Fall 2005 issue of the KSIA Spotlight a quarterly publication of the Kansas Self-Insurers Association.*

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## Supervisor Training Seminars

The annual **KMIT Supervisor Training Seminar** series resumes in February 2006. This highly successful one-day training is intended for **all** 'supervisors'—from lead persons, to division and department heads, to city clerks, police and fire chiefs, city superintendents, city managers, and any and all others who supervise employees.

The training is actually broken down into stand-alone, ½-day sessions, covering **risk control/management** (morning session) and **work comp management** (afternoon). KMIT's professional partners at IMA are the primary presenters at both sessions, in conjunction with League staff.

The 2006 Seminars will be held at three sites: **Concordia** (Thursday, February 9), **Arkansas City** (Thursday, February 16) and **Parsons** (Wednesday, March 1). Registration flyers and other reminders will be sent out early in 2006, but please mark your calendars now. These are excellent training sessions for supervisors, and are VERY affordable.

Please contact Pool Administrator Don Osenbaugh with any questions.

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## Attention Supervisors - KMIT Has Something For You!!

KMIT and IMA have teamed up to offer valuable information geared towards supervisors. The KMIT website now has a link titled KMIT Loss Prevention Training Tools, which takes you to a wealth of information that you can utilize when holding 'toolbox' safety meetings for your employees.

Don't see something you need? Contact Renee Rhodes with IMA, at (316)266-6345 or [renee.rhodes@imacorp.com](mailto:renee.rhodes@imacorp.com), and she will provide you with what you are looking for.

Don't forget...you can access the CompControl and City Safe on-line, as well. Each issue contains valuable information to share with your employees... visit [www.kmit.net](http://www.kmit.net).

# Safe-T-Tips

Statistics prove what you might have already suspected: Employees with more experience have fewer accidents. But training needs to continue for both groups because no one is immune from mishaps.

Percent of all injuries by years of experience:

- 1-5 years service with employer: 37%
- More than 5 years service with employer: 31%

## DID YOU KNOW?



### The Return on Investment of Safety

According to the Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety, for every \$1 you invest in safety, you save between \$3 and \$6 in accident and injury costs.

Making continuous improvements to your safety programs pays big dividends: You'll lower workers' compensation and insurance costs, boost productivity, quality, and morale.







We are always looking for new ideas or topics for City Safe. If you have a topic you would like to see covered in an upcoming edition, please contact Mark Morris at [mmorris@lkm.org](mailto:mmorris@lkm.org) or by phone at (785) 354-9565. We are also looking for knowledgeable authors who would like to write an article about a timely issue concerning safety in your city.

*Your city's New Year's Resolution:  
Make safety your #1 priority.*

*From everyone at KMIT, have a safe and Happy New Year.*

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