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Concussions and Brain Injuries

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When many of us hear the word *concussion,* we think of a sports-related injury. While many concussions do occur in sports, nearly 25 percent of all mild traumatic brain injuries--or concussions--occur at work, with most of those occurring in industrial settings. A concussion is a type of mild traumatic brain injury a (TBI) caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head, or by a hit to the body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. This sudden movement can cause the brain to bounce around or twist inside the skull, creating chemical changes in the brain and sometimes stretching and damaging brain cells. The most common causes of workplace traumatic brain injuries are falls, being struck by or against an object, and motor vehicle collisions. Employers and employees should be aware of the risks, symptoms, and proper procedures for managing concussions in the workplace.

Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms may not appear immediately and may not be noticed for days or even months following an injury. It is important to always monitor anyone that has experienced a head injury for signs and symptoms of a concussion. Concussions do not always result in a loss of consciousness or someone "blacking out." In rare cases, blood clots can form in the skull, putting pressure on the brain and causing more severe issues.

Concussion Danger Signs

- Drowsiness
- Different sized pupils
- Convulsions or seizures
- Trouble recognizing people or places
- Confusion, restlessness, or agitation

Concussion Symptoms

- Unusual behavior
- Loss of consciousness
- Headache (or sense of pressure in your head)
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness
- Seeing stars or lights
- Blurred or double vision
- Slurred speech
- Balance problems
- Sensitivity to light and/or noise

Immediate medical attention is required following a head injury, even if no signs or symptoms are present. The employee should stop working, report the injury to their supervisor, and undergo a medical evaluation.

Prevention

Regular inspections and observations of the workplace can significantly aid in reducing these types of injuries by identifying exposures and hazards. One of the top five observation hazards for IPSC employees is walking-working surfaces. When we proactively identify exposures and make sure walkways and workspaces are free of clutter, cords, puddles, or anything else that could cause a slip, trip, or fall, we help prevent injuries. We should also use caution when working at heights and be mindful of when fall protection is required. Inspect the condition and fit of your PPE, and make sure you are wearing your hard hat to protect yourself from falling objects or low overhangs. Always drive safely--and please wear your seatbelt.

Many of us are silently being watched by those around us--both at work and at home--to see what we do, and how we react. Often, you'll notice others mimicking your behavior. So be safe and remember to set a good example for others to follow.