



Back Belts: Do They Prevent Back Injuries?

The CompWest Difference

CompWest customers are assigned a dedicated loss prevention consultant who works directly with our partner agents and claims examiners to identify and address loss trends while serving as a safety resource.

Back Injuries in the workplace account for a large percentage and billions of dollars in cost. The use of back belts has become very popular with employers and employees alike, expecting an easy solution to a complicated problem. This pamphlet is meant to provide you with important information to help you make informed decisions on their use.

Back belts are also referred to as back supports or abdominal belts. They have been widely used while lifting to prevent or minimize back injuries. There are over 70 types of back belts on the market of different fabric, weight, stretchability, and so on.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) within the Department of Health and Human Services. NIOSH is the federal Institute responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related injuries and illnesses.

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NIOSH conducted one of the largest studies on the use of back belts in retail establishments. The study included interviews with nearly 9,377 employees over a two year period. The study accounted for such factors as workers' back-belt wearing habits, work history, lifestyle habits, job activities, demographic characteristics, and job satisfaction. The study also examined workers' compensation claims among back injuries among these employees.

This two-year study concluded that:

- There is no statistically significant difference between back injury rates among employees who reported using back belts usually every day, and the injury rate among employees who reported never using back belts or using them no more than once or twice a month.
- Similarly, no statistically significant difference was found in comparing the incidence of self-reported back pain among workers who reported using back belts every day, with the incidence among workers who reported never using back belts or using them no more than once or twice a month.
- Even for employees in the most strenuous types of jobs, comparisons of back injury claims and self-reported back pain failed to show any differences in rates or incidence associated with back belt use.
- Also, neither did the study show a statistically significant difference between the rate of back injury claims among employees in stores that required the use of back belts, and the rate of such claims in stores where back belt use was voluntary.

How should you address back injuries?

Rather than providing and requiring the use of back belts, companies should be looking at implementing a comprehensive ergonomic program that evaluates and redesigns work stations and tasks that will reduce the lifting and awkward body motions associated with back injuries, such as repetition, twisting, bending and reaching.

For more information on the study is available at this link: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/updates/beltinj.html> and <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/94-127/>

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