

Professional Underwriters

Safe Schools Agenda

Route to:

- Superintendent
- School Business Off.
- Athletic Director
- Supt. Bldgs/Grounds
- Site Administrators
- Transportation Dir.
- Lunch Director
- Classroom Teachers

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A monthly service provided to help you with your efforts to make your school safe for students, staff and the public

Controlling the Costs of Workers' Compensation – It can be done!

“Workers’ Comp is an onerous cost of doing business. The rates are too high, and there is nothing that we can do in the shop to stop people from doing stupid things and getting hurt.” Sound familiar? It is a myth, and has been around too long. The reality is that W.C. can be controlled, and is being controlled by members who vigorously pursue a program of risk management, beginning with management commitment and ongoing leadership.

The first step is for the CEO (preferably) or his deputy to convene a meeting of “movers and shakers” to conduct a health check of the WC risk management program results and processes. Get all the actors involved – your broker, claims manager and medical advisor. Give each an assignment to bring data and opinions to the meeting, and make sure that each has an assignment and a due date when he/she leaves the meeting. Start the meeting with a presentation on loss control by a representative of your insurance company so that committee members can use the model in their assessment of internal processes.

Consider inviting a union representative right from the beginning so that there will be input from employee perspective as well as potential buy-in for future decisions.

Pick a focus for action, based on analysis of claims data. This will go quicker if your claims manager and insurance broker bring the data to the meeting with them. Dig into every event and process that is generated by a particular type of injury. Look for

inaction, lack of planning and poor communication with the employee, the insurance adjuster, the medical provider, and your supervisors.

If you really dig into your internal claims management process, you may find that what you have is a clerical process, but you need a claims management process. Examine your claims process with this question in mind: “Are we fulfilling the goals of taking care of the employee and getting him back to work as soon as possible? How can we do it better?”

If your examination of claims costs leads you to the conclusion that you have too many claims and they are lasting too long, the fault is not in lawyers who run up the costs, or doctors who will “sign anything to make the employee happy.” The fault is in poor internal communications, poor focus and follow-up by inadequate personnel and possibly poor priority setting by management.

Inadequate relationships with providers actually help injured employees sit at home rather than coming back to work. Most employees want to come back as soon as possible for financial and social reasons. But there are exceptions, and those are the ones that run up costs inordinately.

You will want to have strong relationships with your institutional doctor, even in states where the employee can go to the doctor of his choice. He will be your medical advisor, and you should not hesitate to consult him at every stage in the claims-get well-get back to work process. Your medical advisor should be familiar with your work environments and work processes and should be prepared to prescribe work duties that help the employee get back to work as soon as possible.

There is much more to look at and tweak in order to put a comprehensive risk management program in place. Take a look at www.workerscompkit.com. This is a commercial site that offers a complete set of processes and forms for evaluating and organizing your program. And be proactive. You can control WC costs!

The Essentials of Claims Management

Before the Injury:

- ☑ Use regular safety inspections with thorough follow-up to reduce workplace hazards.
- ☑ Conduct an ongoing program of safety awareness for all employees.
- ☑ Establish a policy for accident and injury reporting, and for medical treatment.
- ☑ Establish a back-to-work policy and program.
- ☑ Establish a policy of directing injured employees to the district physician for treatment as much as possible. Use the district physician–advisor in monitoring treatment and assisting in the back–to–work program.

After the injury:

- ☑ Address injuries quickly. Get a diagnosis. Getting quick treatment and diagnosis can reduce both the severity and timeframe of a claim. Furthermore, you want everyone to know that you want injured employees to be well again and back at work.
- ☑ Use the best medical providers available, and monitor their work. This is an important function of your medical advisor and your claims manager.
- ☑ Stay in touch with the employee and his medical providers. Push forward appointments as much as possible. Beware of the general practitioner who dawdles, hoping to treat the condition

rather than referring the injured employee to a specialist.

- ☑ Establish personal relationships with medical providers and with your carrier’s claims people.
- ☑ Never let the employee feel alone. Keep track of his claim and his progress to wellness. Keep in touch with providers, the insurance carrier, and especially the employee.
- ☑ Do not blame the employee for the injury. Do not ignore him. If he is hospitalized visit, and send flowers. For minor injuries, require supervisors to stay in touch with the injured employee. Consistently send this message: “We are sorry it happened. We miss you and just want you to get better as quickly as possible. Are the doctors taking care of you? Let us know if you need anything.”
- ☑ Beware of employee-directed care. Typically, the employee will choose his family physician. Make sure that the physician knows that he is dealing with a workers’ compensation claim and you and your medical advisor have to have access to as much information as the law allows related to the claim. Write a detailed letter expressing your concern for the employee’s well-being and your commitment to prompt, quality care. Provide a detailed description of light-duty work.

Good claims management is not anti-employee. You care about your employees, and getting prompt, competent attention to their well-being serves the health of the organization as well. You have to watch your expenses, but doing it by skimping on medical care is not productive. A well managed claims process is good for employee morale and future insurance savings.

