

Optimizing Supervisor Response to Work Injury



Wayne S. Maynard, CSP, CPE
Director-Ergonomics & Tribology
Liberty Mutual Research Institute for safety

International Telecommunications Safety Conference 9/21/06

Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety



...to advance scientific knowledge in the areas of workplace and highway injury prevention and mitigation, and return to work.

- Center for Safety Research
- Center for Disability Research
- Quantitative Analysis Unit



LMRIS Research

- **Strategic**
 - Focus on areas of greatest societal burden
 - Business-relevant (loss prevention)
 - Multi-disciplinary
- **Non proprietary**
 - Publish in peer-reviewed scientific journals
- **International collaborations**
 - Harvard, Tsinghua, others
 - National institutes for health and safety

Session Agenda

- Overall research: supervisor and response to work injuries
- Liberty Mutual research: Training to improve response and get results (Shaw et al.)
- Developing a training program: Training modules from “Optimizing Supervisor Response To Work Injury”

The Safety Management Process



Pre - Injury Prevention

Management Leadership

Ergonomic Job Accommodations

Targeting Primary Cost Drivers

Transitional Duty

Job Hazard Analysis

Worker

Hazard Reduction & Control

Health Care Liaison Plan

Education and Training

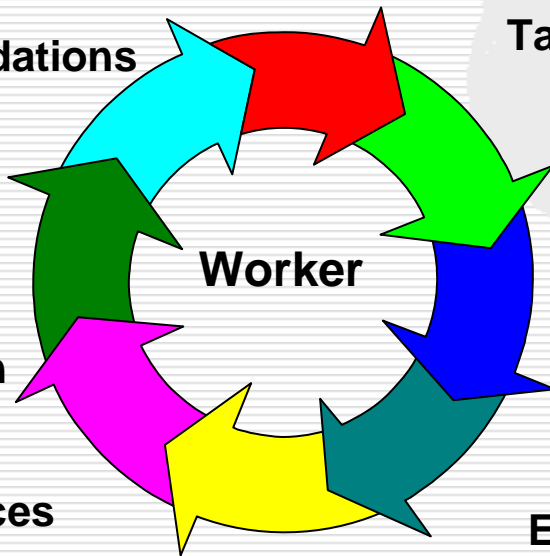
Rehabilitation Services

Employee Participation

Disability Management Programs

Job Placement Medical Evaluations

Post - Injury Return to Work



March 9, 2006

Liberty Mutual Study: Reduce Future Disability Claims and Costs by Nearly 50 Percent

Reduce Future Disability Claims and Costs by Nearly 50 Percent By Improving Supervisor Response to Worker Injury and Illness

HOPKINTON, MA – Companies that improve the way supervisors respond to employees' work-related health and safety concerns can produce significant and sustainable reductions in future injury claims and disability costs, according to a new study from the Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety.

Supervisors trained to properly respond, communicate and problem solve with employees reduced new disability claims by 47 percent and active lost-time claims by 18 percent.

The supervisor-training program studied by the Research Institute provided education and training for both management and supervisors to help them respond better to worker injuries. The program also included suggestions for employee communication and problem solving skills to help get injured employees back to work. The results were dramatic.

"In this study, we saw a substantial reduction in injury claim frequency and disability. Supervisors clearly learned new skills and expressed confidence that they could better deal with these issues," said William Shaw, Ph.D., lead investigation researcher at the Liberty Mutual Research Institute. "Employers in industries with highly physical work demands can use this program to improve communication between supervisors and workers on work-related health issues. It's an effective disability prevention strategy."

Training: Measuring Success

■ Safety Approach

- Organizational readiness assessment
 - Needs analysis
 - Skills and knowledge assessment
- Development plans
- Training implementation
- Training Evaluation
 - Results!

■ Research

- Organizational readiness assessment
 - Supervisor needs assessment organizational response survey
 - EE survey
- Training design
- Training implementation
- Training Evaluation
 - Pre and post session survey

Supporting Research

- Work and organizational factors have been shown to influence frequency and disability duration of workplace injuries (NRC, 2001)
- Many workers report indifference or hostility from supervisors after reporting MSD pain and discomfort (Strunin & Boden, 2000)
- Workers with disabling conditions list responsiveness of their supervisors as a major determinant in their decision to return to work (Akabus & Gates, 1991)
- Training alone to improve injury response has never been studied



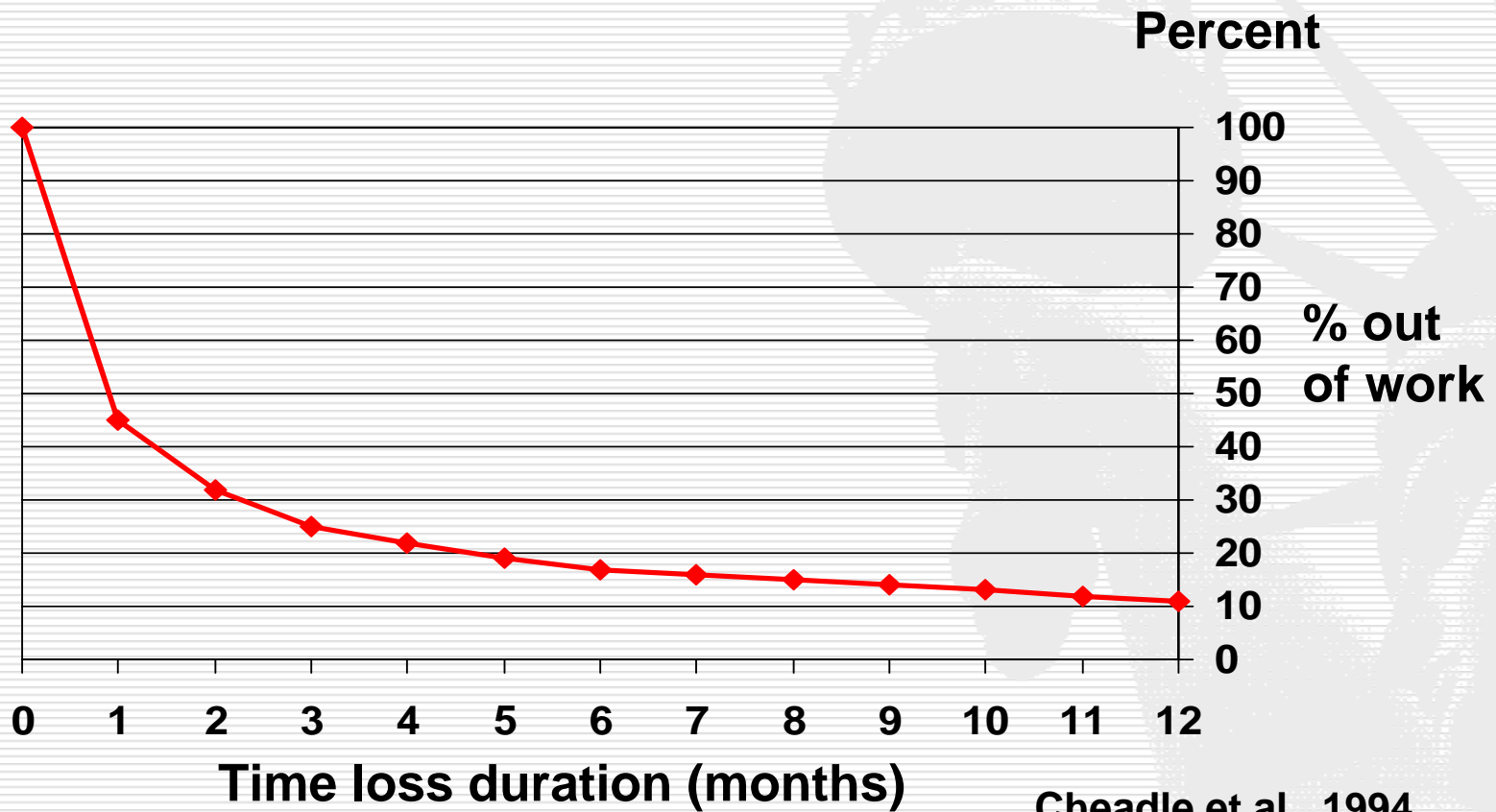
Overall Conclusions From Research

1. Supervisors have a critical role in disability prevention
2. Immediate response by supervisor to workers reporting work-related injury significantly influences length of disability
3. Supervisor attitudes and practices can impede return to work and rehabilitation for injured workers
4. Improving response of supervisors to reports of work-related MSD discomfort can have significant and independent effects on disability outcomes

Why MSDs?

- Very costly (Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index)
- Lengths of disability nearly twice as all other WC claims
- Nonspecific or unknown causes
- Frustration with prevention
- Frustration with return to work
- Bad experiences both employee and supervisor

Disability for Musculoskeletal Injuries and Illnesses

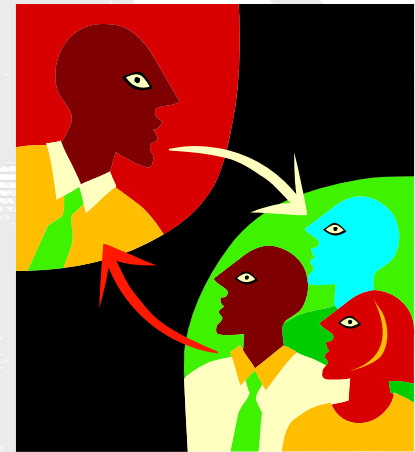


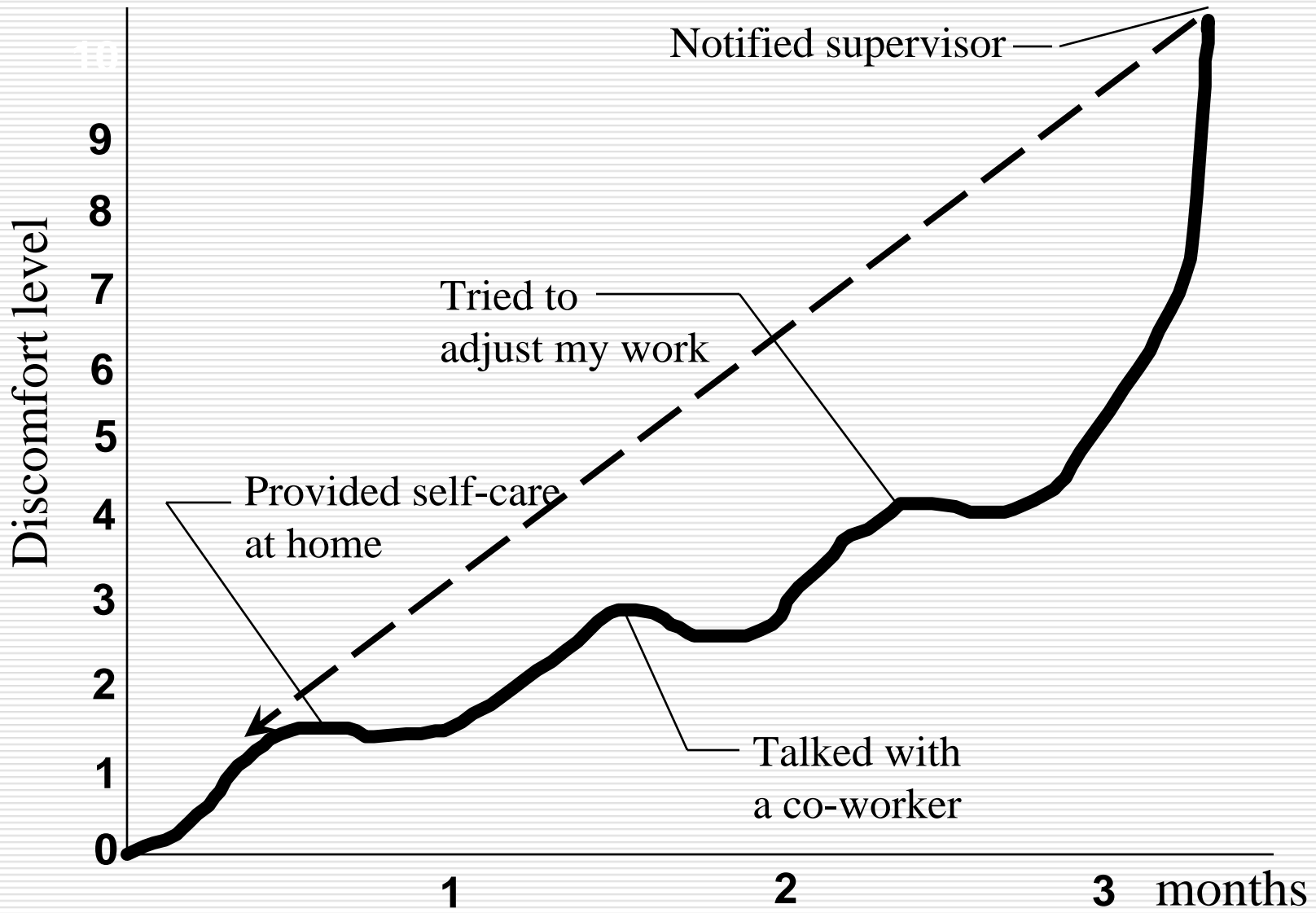
Cheadle et al., 1994

Employee Surveys: Common Themes

■ Employee perceptions that supervisors:

- Blame worker for the injury
- Never contacted the worker after the injury
- Didn't speak with the worker privately
- Discouraged the worker from filing a claim
- Didn't believe the symptoms were real
- Were angry with the worker for being injured
- Didn't try to work out solutions with the worker





GRADUAL ONSET OF MUSCULOSKELETAL PAIN

**Shaw, W.S., Robertson, M.M.,
McLellan, R.K., Verma, S., and
Pransky, G., A Controlled Case
Study of Supervisor Training To
Optimize Response To Injury in
the Food Processing Industry,
Work, Vol. 26, pp. 107-114 (2006)**

Training Research Results

- Two training groups: staggered training N=23 (400 EEs each group)
 - Group 2 trained seven months after Group 1
- Three time periods; claims
 - 1-7 month pre-intervention
 - 8-14 and 9-21 months post-intervention
- Overall results
 - 47% reduction new claims, 18% reduction active lost-time claims (Group 1)
 - 27% reduction new claims, 7% reduction active lost-time claims control (Group 2)

Optimizing Supervisor Response to Work Injury

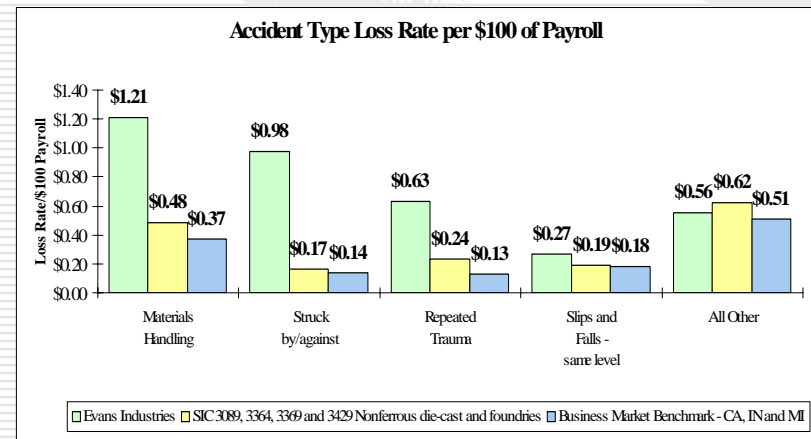


Session Objectives

- Improve your role in controlling disability associated with work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs)
- Communicate effectively with injured workers
- Increase options for accommodation and reintegration of injured workers
- Reduce conflicts arising from disability
- Increase productivity and improve bottom line
- Improve retention of employees

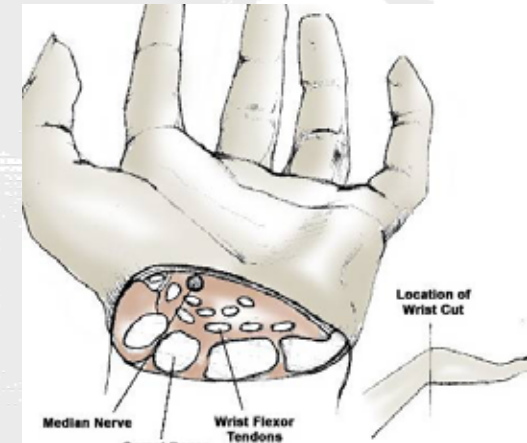
Introduction

- What are MSDs?
- WC incident, claims and claims cost discussion (customize if possible)
- WMSDs and Disability



Module 1

- Rationale For Supervisor Involvement
 - Safety management process and supervisor role
 - Brainstorm barriers and enablers to managing work injuries
 - MSD descriptions and types of disorders
 - MSD disability



Module 2

■ Responding To Musculoskeletal Discomfort

- Safety management process
- MSD discomfort and early reporting
- Active listening techniques
- Video workshop (1 and 2)



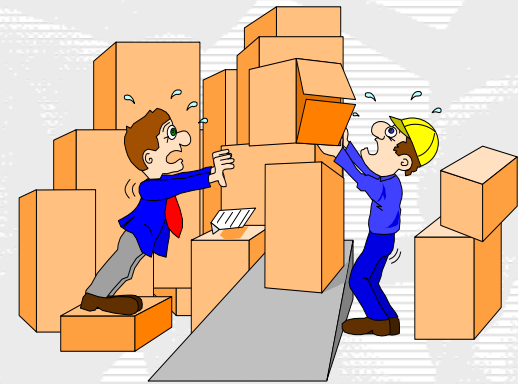
Module 3

- Understanding Musculoskeletal Discomfort and Disorders
 - Medical evaluation and treatment
 - First aid and self care techniques
 - Medical red flags for upper extremity disorders and low back pain



Module 4

- Ergonomic Work Modifications and Problem Solving
 - What is ergonomics?
 - Upper extremity and low back pain occupational risk factors
 - Ergonomic strategies for workplace accommodation
 - Reducing risk factors and examples (customize)
 - Collaborative problem solving



Module 5

- Maintaining Communication After Injury
 - Supervisor role
 - Maintaining contact with employee
 - Assessing functional limitations
 - Video workshop (3 and 4)



Module 6

- Reintegration and Return To Work
 - First day back
 - Problem solving
 - Make a plan
 - Follow-up
 - Video workshop (5 and 6)



Summary

- The supervisor's role is critical in controlling disability costs
- Timely & appropriate communication with workers is essential
- Use ergonomic principles to accommodate disabled employees and facilitate return to work
- A training program for supervisors can significantly reduce length and cost of lost time