



Baseline Testing Provides a Win



Summary:

Marten Transport had an ROI of 3.7 to 1 in its workers' comp program from baseline testing of employees.

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According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the incidence of musculoskeletal injuries (MSD) cases for heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers increased to 355.4 cases per 10,000 full-time workers in 2014, up from 322.8 in 2013. This is more than three times greater than the rate for all private sector workers.

Companies are faced with increasing exposure from MSD claims, not only from state regulations but from compliance with federal mandates that increase potential exposure for these types of injuries. (The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines MSD as injuries or disorders of the muscles, nerves, tendons, joints and cartilage as well as disorders of the nerves, tendons, muscles and supporting structures - the upper and lower limbs, neck and lower back - that are caused, precipitated or exacerbated by sudden exertion or prolonged exposure to physical factors.)

Safety will always play a role in mitigating risks, but, no matter how safe an environment, an employer will always have MSD claims. In the transportation industry, the higher rates of injury can be attributed, in part, to several factors.

The nature of the work is one. Many drivers maintain a poor diet, rarely get enough sleep and are sedentary. As a result, they find themselves more susceptible to heart attacks and diabetes, as well as a myriad of strains, sprains and other musculoskeletal disorders.

Additionally, the percentage of older workers is higher in transportation than in most industries, with the Transportation Research Board estimating as many as 25% of truck drivers will be older than 65 by 2025; that translates into more severe musculoskeletal disorder claims.

So, how can a transportation company turn this around and provide a win for all parties? Let's explore through a case study:

Marten Transport is a multi-faceted provider of transportation services offering over the road (OTR), regional, intermodal and temperature-controlled truckload services. The company has 15 operational centers and more than 3,670 employees and contractors. It needed to provide better care for MSD injuries while not accepting liability for injuries occurred outside the scope of work. Marten decided to institute the EFA Soft Tissue Management (EFA-STM) program in February 2015 to determine which injuries were work-related and which were not, as well as to provide better care.

According to Deborah Konkel, the work comp claims manager for Marten, the company uses the EFA-STM "as a fact-finding tool to help us, our employees and their medical providers better understand the nature of their injury and determine the best course of action going forward." Under the EFA-STM program, workers are given a baseline test that is unread; after a reported injury, a second test is conducted. That data is compared with the baseline test to identify the new acute condition, distinct from any pre-existing chronic conditions.

The EFA-STM program is a paradigm shift in workers' compensation because it provides benefits for all stakeholders by accurately separating work-related injuries from those that are not work-related and by providing objective information and, thus, better care for the work-related condition. The key question is what the physical condition of the employee was before the incident and what needs to be done to return him to pre-injury status. EFA-STM provides the required data.

To determine the benefit of the EFA-STM program, Marten's workers' compensation claims data from 2010-2014 was compared with claims data from 2015. The average rate of MSD injuries per 100 hires from 2010-14 was compared with the 2015 rate. The result was a 60% drop in the rate of MSD injuries per 100 hires in 2015. This translated into almost 40 fewer MSD claims in 2015. Using the 2010-14 average cost per MSD claim, the EFA-STM program yielded a direct ROI of 3.7: 1.

"Based on these results, we believe that the EFA-STM program has been a win for all parties involved and a must for companies, especially in the transportation industry" Konkel said.



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