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## Keeping workers fit for the job

By [Mike Marsh](#)  
The Daily World

Sunday, September 20, 2009 1:13 AM PDT

*Employee maintenance center helps workers deal with job-related injuries*

In the National Football League, injuries come with the territory. So in order to keep the players in top physical condition and on the field, teams employ professional trainers, physical therapists and state-of-the-art fitness equipment.

Workers in industrial plants and manufacturing facilities have demanding jobs of their own and given the physical requirements necessary to perform specific tasks, they also have job-related injuries to deal with.



[MACLEOD PAPPIDAS](#) | THE DAILY WORLD Mike Schneider, a certified fitness trainer with InjuryFree, helps Ron Lutzvick, an environmental technician, with a sore lower back in the new Employee Maintenance Center at the Grays Harbor Paper plant in Hoquiam.

So why don't industrial businesses do the same as organized sports teams and hire a training staff to help prevent injuries? Aren't mill workers as critical to a company's bottom line as athletes are to winning seasons?

Grays Harbor Paper thinks so. That's why the company has teamed with InjuryFree Inc., a Woodinville-based company specializing in Employee Maintenance Centers, free on-site fitness and therapy clinics designed to keep employees performing at the highest level by preventing job-related injuries.

"We have a lot of strains and sprains," said Jamie Quigg, Grays Harbor Paper's sustainability coordinator. "They are our highest injuries and we were trying to find out ways to reduce those. The idea is that you have preventative maintenance on your machines, so why not on your employees?"

"The focus is strength and endurance," said Kelly O'Malley, a regional manager with InjuryFree who works full time at the Grays Harbor Paper center. "Injuries are very expensive and the center

helps companies curtail those injuries. It also gives its employees the ability to stay healthy by showing them better ways to do their job."

"We call them industrial athletes," added O'Malley, noting that most common injuries in the industrial workplace are to the shoulders, back and neck, as well as carpal tunnel syndrome. "If you go to the Seattle Seahawks' training facility, the players are built to be able to handle their job."

While dealing with injuries to workers will always be part of O'Malley's job, preventing injuries before they occur is her primary goal. And being on-site offers a huge advantage

"We get look at the different tasks workers must perform and then we can build exercises for employees that mimic those tasks," she said, pointing to the center's back machine, universal gym, and training tables for stretching exercises. "If we find that someone is weak in a certain area, we target that area for strengthening."

Being on-site also gives workers better access to the center.

"There is a great Y here in town," explained O'Malley, "but after working 12-hour shifts, it's not always the first place that people run to, so being on-site gives employees really good access."

Since the Employee Maintenance Center at Grays Harbor paper opened in August, O'Malley says she has seen 33 percent of the company's employees. Several are already seeing results.

Ron Lutzvick, an environmental technician from Cosmopolis, says he was having hip soreness for several months. After only a few therapy sessions, the pain has subsided.

"I used to deal with an injury like everybody else did," he said. "I would take an aspirin and ignore it. I think (the Employee Maintenance Center) is great. It's right here and I'm very happy with it."

Beth Giroski, who works for Grays Harbor Paper's inside sales department, had surgery on her neck seven years ago to help with a disc degeneration problem. Since the surgery, she's suffered from chronic migraines and muscle knots in her back and shoulders. She's tried everything from physical therapy to chiropractors, electro-stimulus treatment and massage.

"They addressed the part of my neck that nobody else would touch. Right where the surgery was," she explained about her first trip to the center. "Right away I felt a big difference."

Giroski says with simple stretching and posture exercises she's been able to relieve her pain and the migraines have subsided.

"I'm impressed," she said. "I really am. Now it's just up to me to keep up the exercises."

O'Malley is also impressed, both with the employees her staff has treated and with the commitment from Grays Harbor Paper.

"Back in the day, owners knew injuries were just part of the deal," said O'Malley. "Now that is shifting and businesses are realizing that they need to take care of their employees. Companies maintain their machines, but employees are a company's biggest asset and we need to maintain them."

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