

**Injury** *free*

***Employee  
Maintenance  
Center  
Case Study***

 **Kimberly-Clark**

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# The Everett safety solution

**A new approach to employee safety and wellness yields quick, impressive results: a dramatically lower injuries and workers' compensation costs.**

By Lee Green, Contributing Writer

For the first few years after K-C acquired the Everett mill, workers' compensation costs held steady. Then, at the end of 2002, the mill tallied its annual workers' comp outlay and the result looked like a computation error: costs had plummeted in just 12 months.

But it was no mistake.

## **Gradual improvement – then a leap**

What could possibly lead to such a dramatic drop in on-the-job injuries and, thus, workers' compensation costs? Under K-C management, the Everett mill had gradually improved its work environment and safety record. In mid-2001, the facility began implementing K-C's new SMART model, the Safety Management and Assessment Rating Tool.

But these changes, while significant, couldn't truly account for the mill's dramatic reduction in workers' comp costs last year.

Half of the mill's injuries were ergonomic-related, the sort of overuse and repetition injuries specific to certain job tasks. Despite safety improvements, "Employees still needed to bend and squat and use their shoulders, and we didn't really have anything in place to address the injuries resulting from that," says Mill Manager Dave Faddis.

So how did Everett make such a huge leap in injury reductions?

It's too early to draw firm conclusions, but evidence points to a new injury prevention and treatment program the mill began experimenting with two years ago and rolled out to the facility's entire workforce in 2002.

Could a new approach to workers' physical well-being make a profound difference? "We have unsolicited feedback from employees saying it's the best thing the company has ever done for them," Faddis says.

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## **The Result?**

**Absenteeism is down, workers' comp claims are down and production is up.**

## **InjuryFree raises eyebrows, lowers injuries**

The object of such high praise is an innovative, on-site clinical program designed and implemented by InjuryFree, a small company in Bothell, Washington.

InjuryFree uses state-of-the-art diagnostic and conditioning equipment to identify and strengthen weak joints and associated muscles in the bodies of workers who volunteer to participate.

A staff of exercise physiologists, physical therapists, athletic trainers and fitness coaches – four or five of whom are on hand at the mill for 16 hours each workday – also helps participating K-Cers increase their flexibility and range of motion. K-C provides these services at no cost to employees other than 15 or 20 minutes of their time, two to three times a week.

Just two months after the InjuryFree program was introduced to employees at the Everett mill's distribution warehouse in 2001, participants showed striking strength gains in specific joint-and-muscle sites. Average strength gains measured were:

- Neck – **38 percent strength gain**
- Back – **25 percent strength gain**
- Knees – **33 percent strength gain**

After 12 months, the average back-strength improvement measured 87 percent and range of motion increased 26 percent.

Everyone knows that resolutions to stick with a fitness regime can fade over time, but InjuryFree is obviously operating on a whole new plane: after one year, the program's participant dropout rate was a mere 1 percent.

## **A stronger workforce**

In the past year participating K-Cers have recorded striking improvements in strength. **Absenteeism is down, workers' comp claims are down, production is up** and Faddis says morale is up.

This year, continues Faddis, the mill is using InjuryFree's expertise to identify injury trends associated with specific tasks and to determine baseline physical requirements for certain jobs. Eventually, new employees may be screened to make sure they meet those requirements and some tasks or equipment may be modified to achieve ergonomic improvements.

"The longer we work with InjuryFree," says Faddis, "the more useful applications we're finding."

**“...too many people get injured, fail to find solutions within traditional healthcare, and ultimately find themselves in retirement spending all their dollars on healthcare.”**

## **Why the InjuryFree approach works**

Corporate wellness programs typically emphasize such issues as body fat, weight, cardiovascular health, nutrition, smoking and exercise.

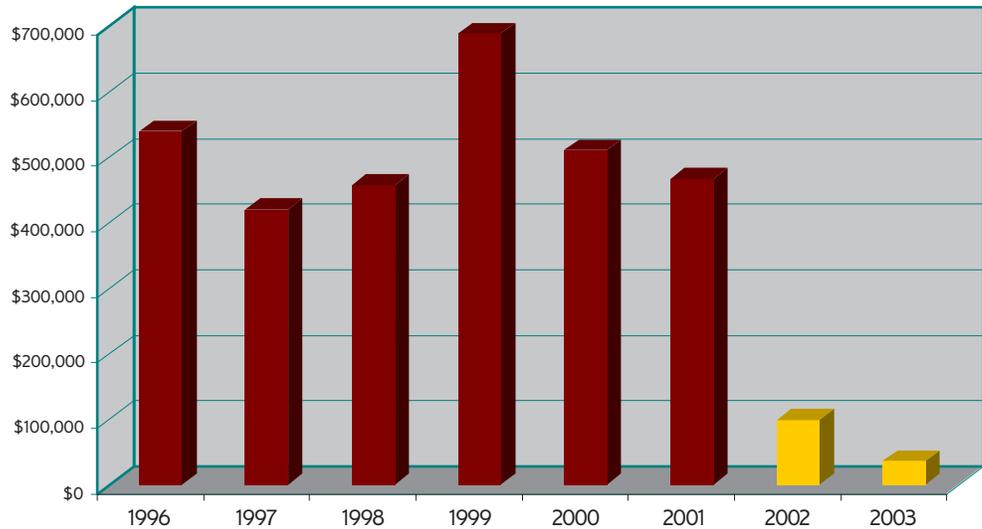
While recognizing that these elements are vitally important to human health, InjuryFree focuses instead on muscular-skeletal conditioning, flexibility and range-of-motion, issues crucial in life in general but especially in the workplace. Thanks to computerized technology, weaknesses in specific joints and muscles can be identified and measured and then measured again later to monitor progress. Sophisticated machines focus on a particular muscle-and-joint system.

“We’re not here to get people healthy. We’re here to keep people working,” says Trent Shuford, InjuryFree’s founder, owner and CEO. “Or to get them out of pain so they can return to work. My ultimate goal is to help people get to retirement pain- and injury-free. I’ve seen too many people get injured, fail to find solutions within traditional healthcare, and ultimately find themselves in retirement spending all their dollars on healthcare. That’s not a good place to be.”

InjuryFree’s program is designed not just to address existing injuries, but to eliminate anatomical imbalances and weaknesses that, if left untreated, would likely lead to more injuries or chronic pain.

“A lot of what we’re doing is similar to what goes on in athletic training rooms, but we have added technology that’s often unavailable in training rooms because of the cost of the machines,” says Shuford. “And our approach is much more specific than you would find in a health club.”

**InjuryFree  
succeeded  
in reducing  
injuries and  
time lost,  
and saved  
Kimberly-  
Clark  
hundreds of  
thousands  
of dollars  
in medical  
claims**



From 1996-2001, the average annual total paid out for muscular-skeletal injuries was \$514,071. Since the companywide implementation of the InjuryFree Wellness Program, the average annual total paid out for muscular-skeletal injuries was \$67,851. (through June 2003)

## Employee Testimonials

**“Reduction in neck and back pain and increased range of motion in neck.”**

Richard Bell (Neck Program, Average Change 48.9%)

**“InjuryFree staff works well with individuals and their specific areas of problems and concerns. I’ve improved 100% since starting this program and I’m not getting paid for this testimonial.”**

Mike Hazen (Neck Program, Average Change 19.52%)

**“I’m experiencing less sleep interruption because my neck is stronger.”**

Lynda Elwood (Neck Program, Average Change 38.97%)

**“We have unsolicited feedback from employees saying it’s [InjuryFree] the best thing the company has ever done for them...”**

Dave Faddis  
Mill Manager

**“Sustained an injury to my left knee. Orthopedic surgeon had me off work for two months. He wanted me to take another three months off. Came back to work and started with InjuryFree. When I saw Dr. Eismann three months later, he said “I don’t know what you’re doing, but keep it up.” My knee feels 100% better after 3 months of therapy with InjuryFree.”**

John F. Minor (Knee Program, Average Change 20.69%)

**“Excellent program. I went from having discomfort sitting for long periods and waking with back pain to having neither. I feel better, sleep better and feel good about the progress made using InjuryFree.”**

Steve Saari (Neck Program, Average Change 49.16%)

**“Through InjuryFree, I have significantly improved my lower back strength therefore relieving daily lower backaches and pains. Thanks for your help.”**

Chad Ramzek (Back Program, Average Change 36.36%)

“We have unsolicited feedback from employees saying it’s the best thing the company has ever done for them