

Oregon's Workplace Health and Safety: Looking Forward to 2020

Lunch Workgroup # 4 - Aging Populations

Four Main Themes:

1. **Fitness for duty without discriminating** against older workers
2. **Workplace design for all workers** (accommodation) including job design and scheduling
3. **The integration of technology** in the workplace and how to train and retrain the workforce
4. **Developing a team approach to span generational differences** – exploit the strengths of each employee no matter where they are in their career stage

Notes:

**Fitness for duty without discriminating against older workers

- Physical labor for those who do not get promoted up
- What to do to alleviate the risk for physical labor?

** Finding accommodations for older workers (i.e., different work tasks, PPE)

- Workplace design for all people – Universal Design

*A lot of focused attention to prevent age discrimination (laws) but on the flip side recognizing that declines do occur. How to reconcile these differences?

* Increased incidents with heavy equipment – fit for duty

* Must extend the issues with fitness for duty down to different age groups because there are epidemic issues with being overweight

- Possibly having interventions that focus on rewarding healthy living and safe work performance could help

* Older workers are staying longer than they want because they need to retain health care, etc – broader policies that impact why older workers stay in the workforce

- Not being able to retire may be a societal issue

* Not everything about an aging population is a negative

- Organizations are losing a lot of experience and knowledge as older workers leave the workforce

- Trying to keep people with the knowledge and experience on the job in order to keep the knowledge and experience in the workplace

- Development of jobs that keep people in the workplace in order to keep valuable
 - “keeping the workers in the game longer”

**As more technology is integrated into the workplace, it leaves older workers in the background

- retraining to use the technology is an issue

- Example: paper charting to electronic records – constantly changing and updating

- Example: Lacking in computer knowledge prevents

- Worry is that the younger workforce is not paying attention because they are so quick to make decisions

- Counterexample – learning new equipment and software is not an age-dependent problem

* Addressing the issue that older workers going from full-time to part time which is not reflected in the statistics. Offering this option could help retain the knowledge and experience in the workforce while providing flexibility to the older worker

* Workers comp perspective – harder to bring older workers back into the workforce after injury

**Cultural change in the organization may be the issue rather than technology itself – in response to adapting the global

* There is a bias that older workers are resistant to change preventing workers from learning

*Continually upgrading knowledge prevents obsolescence and makes it easier to get jobs in a tough market

- There must be a focus on lifelong learning

* If we focus on accommodating older workers we forget about focusing on all stages of a worker's career

- Taking a life span approach to examining this issue may be beneficial

**Solutions for accommodating all workers needs to take a broader perspective by making enhancements that benefit everyone

* Focusing on aging workforce as a liability is not productive

- challenge the older worker to transition the younger workforce

- understanding the generational differences and encourage the older workers to take a more leadership role to shepherd younger workers into a their work role

- providing younger workers the tacit knowledge associated with the job and the work context

**Develop a team approach to addressing organizational issues: Teaming up with the workers so there is a reciprocal sharing of knowledge and experience – exploiting the positive aspects and mitigating the negative aspects of each age stage

*90% of the employers in the state have less than 20 employees which makes it difficult to implement these strategies because they do not have the resources

- smaller employers may be able to network with other small business to share knowledge about how to address issues associated with aging workforce

*Differences in perspective may be due to industry-specific cultures

* Proactive investment in modification and accommodation devices that show that as the employer you care about their health could be a way to retain older workers and provide a safe work environment

- Example – universal design in order to accommodate all types of workers including older workers – difficult to implement in a dynamic

*Providing access to tools to small companies that would help them address issues related to aging

* Recognize that values and motivation change through dramatic events in one life

**Where to draw the line? How do you say that someone is too old to perform the job?

- Performance testing, meeting ADA core functions of the jobs where the task is BFOQ

*Safety laws may be in conflict with ADEA and ADA laws – weight, hearing, vision impairment – Where is the line?

*Must also acknowledge the safety of others as another factor of when you must say no to allowing a worker to continue to perform a job.

- Must all start with a job analysis

*Risk perception of younger workers is less developed which could increase safety issues and is a counterpoint ability to perform the job safely, thus this issue spans across age groups

* What is the physician's involvement in making the fit for duty decisions?

- Can't know all of the intricacies of every job to make this determination

- Risk assessment is extremely difficult because there is no objective test that could say 100% sure that the person can perform the job – use of proxy tests but that gives only a general assessment
- Direct threat to others and self decision is made with tools that may not be appropriate
- Medical education system does a bad job of training physicians about occupational health

* Onus has been placed on the employer but it could be a societal issue where employees stay in the workplace longer than maybe they want to while others use it as way to keep identity and stay active.