

Industry in Crisis?

At least it always seems that way. There never seem to be a shortage of challenges facing our industry. Two that are closely linked and stand out in particular as being nearly crises are the aging workforce and soft tissue injuries.

The Aging Workforce

This phenomenon of the aging workforce is nothing new to any of us. We've watched the average age of the union wall and ceiling professional increase nearly in unison with the calendar – 13 years ago the average age of the drywall carpenter was 12 years less than it is today. Nationally we are seeing the same trend: in some trades nationally the average age is nearing 50. As workers age, their bodies begin to show the signs of years of hard work – aches and pains abound.

Soft Tissue Injuries

Something that is also not new to us is the heavy nature of the work we do. Whether you are a drywall carpenter, finisher or plasterer, the work is heavy and hard. Workers in the industry are exposed to *soft tissue* injuries, which can be difficult to diagnose and treat and can be very costly.

These “pain-without-apparent-cause” injuries can sometimes take a great deal of time to recover completely from, and this sometimes leads to abuse of the system.

What we mean by abuse are unsubstantiated or false claims, or the “malingering” claim that goes on for what seems forever without resolution. Whether this abuse is by the worker, the medical provider or employer, it costs *everyone* in terms of higher industrial insurance premiums. While this can be the whole topic of another issue of the Contractors' News, suffice it to say that with increasing premiums **we are all paying more**. Compound this with increasing experience ratings that many in the industry are incurring, and we see the bill only going up – and our competitiveness in the marketplace going down.

It won't be long before that \$.50 per hour deduction from the workers check will go to \$.75 per hour and in some cases closer to \$1.00 per hour. If you don't believe it, just compare your deductions on the last check of this year with the deduction from next years first paycheck. Don't be surprised if it's more – and possibly a whole lot more.

What Can We Do?

While it may not be possible to eliminate all soft tissue injuries, a simple reduction in the number of them can result in a significant reduction in costs and change the direction we are headed.

So, how do we reduce the possibility of soft tissue injuries? The simple answer – be in proper physical condition and be ready for work. Medical specialists agree on this. If we aren't in condition and ready for work we are more prone to injury.

This means getting in shape and staying in shape. And it means preparing for work. Just like every athlete prepares before for his or her game or event, so should the wall and industry worker prepare daily for the work ahead. Be warmed up and ready to go – be the “industrial athlete”. Muscles and joints warmed up and ready to go are far less susceptible to injury.

So how do we due this? Stayed tuned for the next issue, the plans are in the works!