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SAFETY MATTERS

safety and loss control resource



**Workplace Harassment / Safe Patient Handling /
Holiday Safety / Drywall: Friend and Foe**

Workplace Harassment

A Safe and Respectful Workplace is Everyone's Right

The County of Riverside is committed to maintaining a professional, respectful, and safe Workplace for all employees. Every individual has the right to work in an environment free from discrimination, intimidation, and harassment of any kind. Workplace harassment not only affects employee morale and well-being, but it can also create safety risks, lower productivity, and damage public trust in government operations.

As part of our ongoing commitment to safety and inclusion, this month's newsletter focuses on understanding, preventing, and addressing workplace harassment in accordance with Board Policy's C-25 & C-27.

What Is Workplace Harassment?

Workplace harassment occurs when an employee experiences unwelcome conduct based on a protected characteristic such as:

Race or color	Genetic information
Religion or creed	Marital status
National origin or ancestry	Sex, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation
Physical or mental disability	Age (40 and over)
Medical condition	Military or veteran status

Harassment may include verbal, physical, or visual behavior that Creates a hostile or offensive work environment. It can come from anyone — a supervisor, coworker, contractor, or even a member of the public.

Examples Include:

- Derogatory jokes, slurs, or name-calling
- Displaying offensive materials
- Unwelcome touching
- Repeated unwanted advances
- Retaliation for reporting harassment

The Impact of Harassment on Workplace Safety

Harassment doesn't just violate policy—it undermines safety:

- **Psychological Impact:** Stress and anxiety can reduce focus, increasing the risk of accidents.
- **Team Disruption:** Fear and mistrust hinder cooperation.
- **Operational Impact:** Investigations divert resources from public service.

Your Responsibilities as a County Employee

- Be Respectful – Treat others with professionalism and courtesy.
- Speak Up Early – Report inappropriate conduct immediately.
- Support a Positive Culture – Be an ally and support those who speak up.
- Participate in Training – Complete required harassment prevention training with COR Learning.

Reporting Harassment

If you believe you are being harassed or have witnessed harassment, report it to your Supervisor, Human Resources, Safety Loss Control, or through the anonymous reporting Safety hotline phone number below. You are protected from retaliation for reporting in good faith. All complaints are investigated promptly and confidentially.



During Normal Business Hours	
Human Resources	951-955-3510
Employee Assistance Program (EAP)	951-778-3670
TTY	951-955-8688
24 Hours	
Safety Loss Control Office	951-955-3520
Safety Hotline (voicemail)	951-955-5868

Remember: Respect Is Safety

Workplace harassment is not just a personnel issue—it's a safety issue. A respectful environment promotes communication, teamwork, and trust, which are essential for preventing injuries and maintaining public service excellence.

“See something, say something.” Your voice matters — taking action helps protect everyone.



SAFE PATIENT HANDLING

PROTECTING PATIENTS & STAFF

WHAT IS SAFE PATIENT HANDLING?

Safe Patient Handling (SPH) refers to the safe lifting, transferring, repositioning, or mobilizing of a patient's body in a way that prevents strain or injury to both patients and healthcare workers.

WHY DO WE NEED SAFE PATIENT HANDLING?

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) continue to be the leading cause of lost-workday injuries among healthcare workers (OSHA, n.d.-b). In 2018, private industry reported 27.2 MSD cases per 10,000 full-time workers, while the healthcare and social assistance sector alone accounted for 56,360 MSD cases (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2019).

Nursing assistants experience particularly high risk, with an MSD rate of 166.3 per 10,000 workers—over five times the national average (OSHA, n.d.-a). Additionally, up to 77% of nurses report experiencing work-related musculoskeletal disorders during their careers (Al-Abbas et al., 2023).

These figures highlight the physical demands of patient care and the ongoing need for structured SPH programs to protect healthcare teams and patients alike.

THE LAW BEHIND SAFE PATIENT HANDLING

California's Assembly Bill 1136 (AB-1136), enacted January 1, 2012, amended the California Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1973 to require all general acute-care hospitals to implement SPH policies and plans aimed at preventing musculoskeletal injuries

Hospitals under the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation are exempt from this requirement (Barihab, 2023).

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS:

Hospitals must replace manual lifting with mechanical lifts, transfer devices, and lift teams (Human Factors and Ergonomics Society [HFES], 2021). A lift team consists of trained healthcare workers proficient in SPH techniques and equipment use. Manual lifting of patients should only occur in emergency situations (HFES, 2021).

WHEN SHOULD DEVICES BE USED?

Devices must be used according to each patient's condition and clinician assessment. The law also protects healthcare workers from disciplinary action if they refuse unsafe manual lifting (OSHA, n.d.-b)

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

Cal/OSHA is responsible for enforcing SPH requirements statewide (Barihab, 2023). Employers must maintain compliant programs and ensure all staff receive training, but every employee shares responsibility for reporting hazards and maintaining a safe care environment (OSHA, n.d.-b).

REPORTING, TRAINING, & ACCOUNTABILITY



INCIDENT REPORTING: YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Filing incident or near-miss reports helps healthcare organizations:

- *Identify trends and problem areas*
- *Determine equipment and staffing needs*
- *Implement corrective actions that protect both staff and patients (OSHA, n.d.-b)*



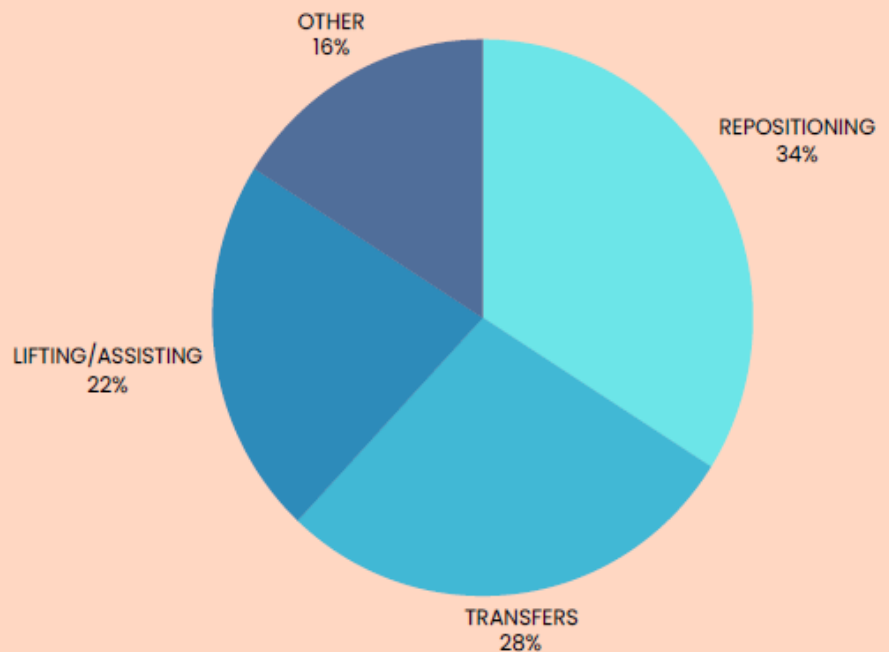
The data shown highlights the most common causes of patient-handling injuries among healthcare staff.

Repositioning and transfer activities account for more than half of all reported incidents (NIOSH, 2023; OSHA, n.d.-b).

These findings emphasize the importance of using mechanical lifts, slide sheets, and proper body mechanics to reduce strain and prevent repetitive motion injuries.

TOP CAUSES OF STAFF INJURIES

(NIOSH, 2023; OSHA, n.d.-b)



QUICK TAKEAWAYS

- Use assistive devices whenever possible — manual lifts only in emergencies
- Report all injuries and near misses promptly
- Request refresher or additional SPH training as needed
- Safe patient handling protects you, your coworkers, and your patients

HOLIDAY SAFETY

The holiday season is a time for joy and celebration, but it is also important to prioritize safety in your home and office. Whether you're decorating with festive lights or preparing delicious meals for your loved ones, a few simple precautions can help ensure your holidays are memorable for all the right reasons. Here are some of our top holiday safety tips.

Make fire prevention a priority!

Holiday decorations and cooking can increase the risk of fire-related injuries and property damage. In fact, the holiday season from November through the new year are peak days for indoor fire incident according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). You can minimize fire hazards by:



- **Use Fireworks Appropriately:** Before celebrating with fireworks, check local laws regarding their use and follow all regulations. Use fireworks outside only, away from buildings and trees, and never relight a firework that fails to explode.
- **Choose safe decorations:** Opt for flame-resistant or flame-retardant. Ensure decorations are not placed too close to heat sources like fireplaces or heaters.
- **Inspect decorative lights:** Inspect for frayed wires, damaged sockets, loose connections, or broken bulbs before hanging them. Use clips instead of nails to hang lights to avoid damaging cords.
- **Be smart with candles:** Keep candles at least 12 inches from anything that can burn and consider using battery-operated flameless candles instead.
- **Avoid overloading electrical outlets:** Do not overload with too many decorations or electrical devices. Never try to make a three-prong plug fit into a two-prong outlet.
- **Fire sprinklers:** Never hang decorations from fire sprinklers. Cal/OSHA regulations state that stacked materials should never be closer than 18 inches below fire sprinklers.
- **Never leave cooking food unattended:** Keep the cooking area clear of flammable items. Keep children away from the stove. Keep matches and utility lighters out of the reach of children.
- **Inspect smoke detector:** Ensure smoke alarms are in working order and keep a fire extinguisher nearby. If you suspect a fire, evacuate immediately and call 911 from a safe location.



Holiday Safety at Office:

- It is everyone's job to help prevent fires! Keep up to date on fire safety and be aware of your office environment.
- Check all cords and replace any that are frayed or broken. Do not daisy chain! Daisy chaining involves plugging an outlet strip into another outlet strip. Extension cords should not be used as a permanent source of power.
- Turn off all indoor and outdoor electrical decorations before leaving. Refrain from placing extension cords in high-traffic areas of your workplace, or under rugs, carpets or furniture.
- Do not store items touching the ceiling. A minimum vertical clearance of **18 inches** must be maintained between the top of any stored materials and the sprinkler heads. **24 inches** below the ceiling in non-sprinklered areas.
- Be alert and don't walk away while using kitchen equipment. Keep anything that can catch fire away from open flames or hot surfaces and review proper microwave use. Do not place aluminum foil, single use plastic, Styrofoam, or anything metal in the microwaves.
- If using a space heater, keep the heater 3 feet away from objects and do not elevate the heater. Plug the heater directly into the outlet and ensure it has auto shut off features. Never leave heaters unattended and turn them off before leaving the room.
- Conduct at least one Fire Drill in a year with evacuation for your office location.
- Fire extinguisher(s) must serviced, certified annually and inspected monthly. Do not block Fire extinguisher, walkway, and electrical panel.
- Always know at least 2 routes of evacuation and know your assembly area. All employees must report to their assembly area to be accounted for.
- **Review your Emergency Action Plan to ensure you know how to respond to a fire event.**

Prevent slips, trips, and falls!

The holiday season comes with potential hazards that can lead to slips, trips, and falls. Decorations, winter weather, and an increase in activities can create an environment where accidents are more likely to occur. Take proactive fall prevention measures by:

- Making sure walkways, driveways, sidewalks, and other high-traffic areas are clear obstacles (decorations, electrical cords, etc....).
- Ensuring indoor and outdoor spaces are well-lit.
- Being mindful when using a ladder for hanging outdoor lights or other decorations.
- Do not stand on a chair to hang decorations. Use a stepladder, and make sure to read and follow the instructions and warnings on the label.



Food Safety:

Good food starts with safe preparation and ends with proper leftover storage to reduce the potential for food poisoning and other safety concerns. Consider these simple tips for handling food safety:

Wash hands, utensils, and surfaces frequently when preparing or handling food.

Separate raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs from other foods.

Cook food until it reaches a safe temperature. Keep food hot (140° F or above) after cooking if you aren't serving it right away.

Store leftovers properly by refrigerating perishable foods within two hours.



Stay Vaccinated:

To stay protected during the Thanksgiving and winter season, health officials recommend getting vaccinated against respiratory illness such as influenza (flu) and/or Covid. These respiratory illnesses typically surge during the colder months when people gather indoors for holidays.

Keep your holiday plans. Get vaccinated.
Stay protected.
Find vaccines near you at [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov).

Stay Safe on the Roads:

If you're traveling by car during the holidays, you're at greater risk of injury or fatality than other forms of transportation. Thanksgiving weekend is one of the deadliest times of the year for drunk driving, with statistics showing a significant increase in fatalities compared to other times.

It is important to take road safety steps, such as:

- Prepare your vehicle for winter weather conditions in your area.
- Stock an emergency kit in your car, complete with a first aid kit, vehicle emergency supplies (e.g., jumper cables), flashlight and batteries, warm clothes, nonperishable foods, and drinking water.
- Avoid drowsy, drunk or impaired driving and remove distractions such as cell phone use.
- You can find [additional transportation safety tips](#) through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- Take the Dangers of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Seriously. Don't leave your car running in your garage. Don't use a gas range or oven to heat your home. Don't use a generator in an enclosed space.



Be Prepared to Help Family Members and Friends with CPR, AED, and First Aid Training

The holiday season should be a time for gratitude and togetherness. Accidental injuries are bound to happen even with the best intentions. Be prepared to respond to burns, cuts, and other injuries by taking online refreshers. One of the best ways to be prepared for the winter holidays is to brush up on your CPR, AED, and First Aid knowledge.

[Adult and Pediatric First Aid/CPR/AED blended learning course](#)



Drywall: Friend and Foe

If you live or work in Riverside County, chances are you're surrounded by drywall — also known as wallboard or gypsum board. It's the smooth, paintable surface that makes our offices, breakrooms, and hallways look neat and professional. But while drywall is one of the most common building materials in the world, it also has hidden challenges that can affect building safety and indoor air quality.

The Benefits:

Why Drywall Is So Popular

- **Affordable & accessible:** Found at nearly every home improvement store, it's a cost-effective choice for construction and repairs.
- **Lightweight:** Easy to transport and install, even without specialized equipment.
- **Easy to cut & customize:** Perfect for fitting into corners, ceilings, and small repairs.
- **Paintable:** Once primed, it accepts paint beautifully, giving a clean, finished look to any workspace.

Mold

While drywall is an excellent building material, it's also highly porous, which means it absorbs moisture easily. When exposed to water leaks, high humidity, or condensation, drywall can quickly become a breeding ground for mold. Mold growth can appear as black or discolored spots on the surface and may produce musty odors.

Even healthy drywall contains 5–11% water by volume, but if that number rises above 16%, you're entering the 'danger zone.'

Moisture Level	Condition
5–12%	Acceptable range
13–16%	Watch closely — potential moisture issue
17% or higher	Replace immediately

What NOT to Do

- Do not touch or scrub the area.
- Do not spray cleaning solutions or paint over it.
- Do not remove damaged sections yourself.

What TO Do

- Notify your supervisor immediately.
- The Safety Industrial Hygiene team will perform an initial assessment — including visual inspection and air quality testing (humidity, temperature, carbon dioxide, and moisture levels).
- If needed, further tests will be conducted to determine the safest corrective actions.

Have Questions or Concerns?

If you notice discoloration, musty smells, or suspect poor air quality in your building:

- Talk to your supervisor or Department Safety Representative (DSR).
- The Riverside County Safety Loss Control and our Certified Industrial Hygienist Professor James Jackson is here to support a healthy, safe, and comfortable work-place.

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“A small leak today can become tomorrow’s hazard — report it before it spreads.”