

Reap the Benefits of a Safer Workplace

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With a new year comes optimism and opportunity for a successful, safe, and prosperous year. What better time than now to examine your veterinary practice for hazards that may affect the health and safety of your employees and productivity of your practice. Implementing an effective health and safety program for your veterinary practice is one of the best decisions you can make, both for your workers and your bottom line.

Work-related injuries, illnesses, and deaths are costly to everyone. A safe and healthy work environment benefits everyone in more ways than one.

Benefits for Employees

- Increased job satisfaction
- Enhanced self-esteem
- Improved morale
- Sense of well-being
- Financial security

Benefits for the practice

- Positive and caring work environment
- Improved staff morale
- Reduction in employee turnover and absenteeism
- Lower hiring and training costs
- Increase in productivity and profitability
- Reduced insurance costs (health and workers' compensation)

A critical component of any effective safety and health program is a proactive, ongoing process to identify and assess workplace hazards in your veterinary practice. Workplace hazards can be aspects of work that may cause health or safety risks and have the potential to be harmful

(physically or mentally). A hazard is often associated with a condition or activity that, if left unattended or uncontrolled, can result in an injury or illness. Identifying these hazards and eliminating or controlling them early on is the most effective method of preventing injuries and illnesses.

While there are many types of workplace hazards, most can be classified in five main categories:

1. Physical Hazards – Common workplace hazards such as slips, trips and falls, bites and scratches, lifting and handling, noise, electrical, and overcrowded waiting rooms or examination rooms
2. Chemical Hazards – Toxic gases, noxious fumes, and corrosive liquids
3. Radiation Hazards – X-ray machines, high powered lasers, and radioactive materials
4. Biological Hazards – Needles and sharps, syringes containing potentially infectious disease, contaminated specimens, and viruses
5. Ergonomic Hazards – Activities that require heavy lifting, have height restrictions, improper workspace configurations, or repetitive motion

The best way to protect yourself and your employees from these workplace hazards is to identify them and take reasonable steps to prevent their potential for injury or illness.

Inspection of your veterinary practice for safety hazards may include the following actions:

- Regularly inspect your workplace focusing on all operation including employee practices and behavior, equipment, and work area.
- Use a checklist to identify typical hazards associated with:
 - General housekeeping
 - Slip, trip, and fall hazards
 - Ergonomic problems such as problematic workstation design
 - Damage to personal protective equipment
 - Electrical equipment
 - Equipment operation and maintenance
 - Fire protection and equipment
 - Workplace violence
 - Inventory storage and placement
- Analyze available information such as:
 - Workers' compensation claim reports
 - Accident investigations and near-misses
 - Policy and procedures
 - Employee training requirements and documents
- Encourage your employees to take ownership in workplace safety by reporting unsafe acts or conditions to management immediately. Act on employee notifications promptly and acknowledge employees for bringing issues to your attention.

Setting aside time to regularly inspect your workplace for hazards is the first step in the road to a safer, happier, and profitable 2019! ■