

Safe Lifting Large Animals

What Happened...A veterinary technician reported pain to the left shoulder after making an unassisted lift of a 70-pound dog onto an examination table. A few days prior, the technician participated in a two-person lift of a 110-pound dog onto an examination table and felt discomfort and mild pain to the left shoulder but did not report the pain. The initial mild strain was most likely a contributor to the reported work place injury.

Medical Corrective Measures:

The injury resulted in medical treatments *lasting over a year*, which included an MRI, physical therapy, steroid injections and eventually surgery to mend her damaged shoulder.

Claims Costs:

Total Medical Incurred: \$43,354

Total Indemnity Incurred: \$53,124

Preventing Back and Shoulder Injuries in a Veterinary Practice

Back and shoulder injuries can be extremely painful and long lasting. Use engineering and administrative controls along with behavioral based safety approach to prevent back and shoulder injuries.

- ✓ **Engineering controls** remove the hazard at the source to reduce the risks associated with a task.
 - ✓ **Administrative controls** rely on workplace policies, procedures and practices that the employee must follow to minimize the employee's risk of injury.
 - ✓ **Behavior Based Safety (BBS)** continually focuses people's attentions and actions on theirs, and other's daily safety behavior.
1. Lift Tables, Ramps/Stairs: Designate a number of examination rooms and baths for large dogs and have lift tables as the examination table or make available ramps or stairs next to the examination table. *(Engineering Control)*
 2. Train employees to use good lifting mechanics. Lifting an animal is not like lifting a box. The principles are the same but the box doesn't move on its own. Also, consider doing 10-minute stretching exercises prior to opening so employees can warm up before physical exertion. Back belts can be worn but **ONLY** if the employees are trained on good lifting mechanics first. Back belts alone do not provide any protection against a back strain if good mechanics are not used. *(Administrative Control)*
 3. Lifting a large animal, which may be moving, presents unique challenges. Team lifts for any large animal that weighs more than 40 pounds is a good policy to have **AND** enforce. *(Administrative Control)*
 4. In addition to how patients are handled, evaluate other lifting/lowering tasks employees perform. Items like large bags of dog food (50 pounds) need to be stored between knuckle and shoulder height to eliminate the low lift that is a cause of many back and shoulder injuries. *(Engineering Control)*