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## **Interactive Lifting Guidelines Developed to Help Prevent Back Injuries**

Utilizing a grant from the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC), The Ohio State University's Biodynamics Laboratory – part of the University's Institute for Ergonomics – has developed a set of lifting guidelines. These guidelines:

- Provide guidance on the design of lifting tasks to reduce the frequency and severity of initial and recurring back claims; and
- Aid in developing realistic transitional work programs for employees with low-back disorders.

Now, the BWC has developed an interactive version of these guidelines, which is available to employers, medical professionals, transitional work developers and other customers, via BWC's web site, <http://www.ohiobwc.com/employer/programs/safety/Ergoliftguide.asp>.

“Back injuries account for 25 percent of all workers' compensation claims and about 40 percent of costs, not to mention the physical and emotional toll they take on injured workers and their families,” said BWC Administrator/CEO James Conrad. “We want to change that.”

These online guidelines allow the user to enter criteria for various lifting tasks. The criteria are analyzed, and a risk level of high, medium or low is given for each lifting task. This helps match the injured worker with appropriate jobs or in the redesign of existing jobs. Lifting tips also are provided to help reduce the risk of injury.

The research project, led by **Dr. William Marras**, professor and director of OSU's Biodynamics Laboratory, examined biomechanical trends associated with increased force on the spine in two lab studies. The lab studies included 123 test subjects – some with low-back disorders, some with healthy backs. In August 2003, the study received an award for outstanding, original research from Liberty Mutual and the International Ergonomics Association.

“With this knowledge, we can more scientifically design the workplace to minimize risk for the returning worker,” Marras said while accepting the award.

For additional information about the lifting guidelines, contact Chris Hamrick, BWC's ergonomics technical advisor, at 614-995-1203.