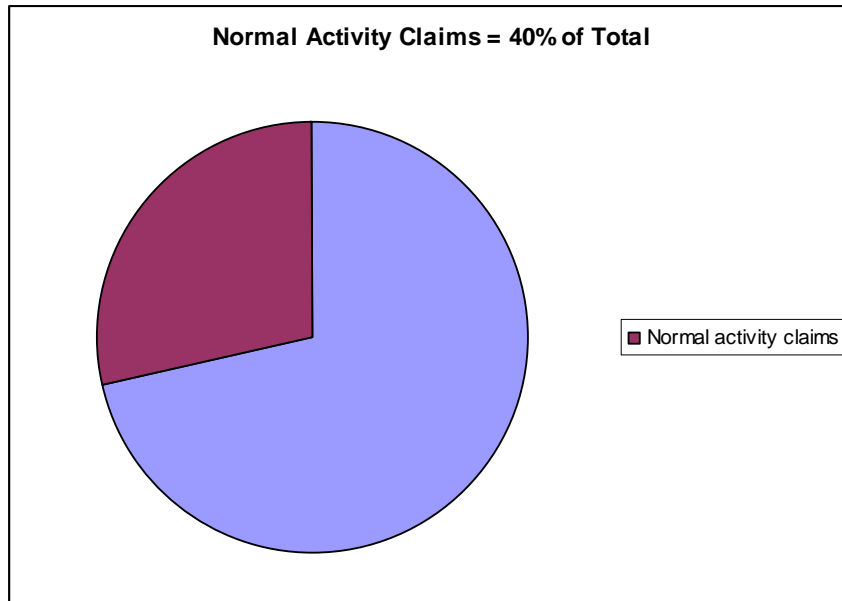


2007-2008 WWU Workers' Compensation Claims

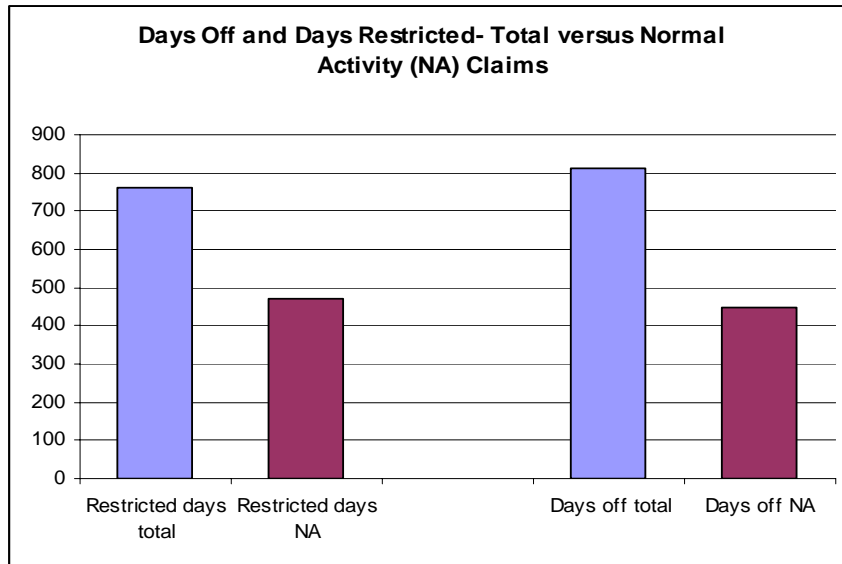
Prevalence and Prevention of Claims Arising from Normal Work Activities

May 8, 2009

Many of the injuries incurred by Western's employees do not stem from traumatic accidents. Too many are simply the result of the normal stresses and strains required by work activities. As shown in the following chart these claims account for 40% of the claims* for the calendar years 2007 and 2008. Examples of the causes listed for these normal work activity (NA) claims include falls on stairs, pain when using power equipment, driving, lifting of boxes or bags, and working at computer workstations.



While they may arise from normal activity, these claims are not necessarily the least damaging to our coworkers. As seen in the chart below these claims account for a large number of restricted duty days and missed days of work.



Basic safety practices remain critical for the prevention of traumatic injury but do not necessarily impact injuries from normal work activities. How, then, to address them and prevent harm to our employees?

Several recent studies provide strong evidence for exercise and wellness as an important part of the answer. In the first study, published in 2007, researchers found that people who exercised three or four times a week had a 16% reduction in risk for repetitive strain injuries at work. The second study, published in February of this year, reviewed high quality studies of interventions aimed at reducing low back pain in working age adults. The only intervention shown to be effective was exercise. A third study, also from February of this year, looked at the effect of a lifestyle intervention program at the University of Virginia on workers with diabetes and obesity. The subjects in the lifestyle intervention group reduced their absenteeism and disability rates by as much as 87 percent. Support for implementation of such a lifestyle program is also provided by the preliminary data of another study currently under way. These preliminary results indicate that workers' compensation medical claims for obese workers may cost up to three times more.

With the increased use of technology, many of our employees have mostly sedentary job tasks. After work, busy home and family lives mean exercising for health is often ignored as being too difficult to fit in to the schedule. Encouraging healthy lifestyle choices such as walking and biking to work, walking during breaks, and participation in wellness programs can remove a major barrier to exercise participation and better health.

The aging of the workforce is currently a concern throughout the world and no less so here at Western. While older workers are not necessarily injured more frequently they generally take longer to recover. Improved health, through exercise and healthy lifestyle choices, can help mitigate that issue.

Return on investment is always a concern and certainly at the present time. One facet of this concern is workers' compensation premiums. In 2008 WWU paid nearly a million dollars in premiums. These premiums are a direct cost to taxpayers. Peripheral costs such as impacted productivity and the hiring and supervising of replacement workers can be substantial and are born by Western's budget. Reducing our injury rate by investing in employee wellness could reduce the impact these injuries have on our budget. Reducing our premiums by reducing our injury rate could be pointed to as a positive effort that Western is making to reduce costs to the taxpayers.

The current budget worries add an additional layer of stress to Western's already hard working employees. Exercise is a proven tool for effectively dealing with stress, anxiety, and depression. Encouraging employee wellness through these uncertain times would allow employee access to a healthy means of dealing with these concerns as well as a reminder that they are valued. This helps to improve morale, which has also been shown to reduce employee injury rates.

* The number of normal activity injuries comes from a subjective analysis of claims by the WWU Claims Manager based on specific knowledge of the claims. As an example, a claim for falling while walking normally on stairs would be included but a claim for a fall on steps due to inclement weather conditions would not.