

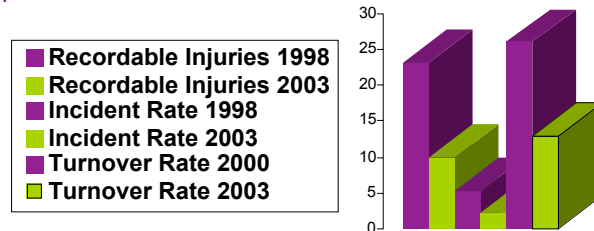
Forward Thinking Manufacturer Shows Flexibility

Pliant Corporation, a leading producer of value-added film and flexible packaging products for personal care, medical, food, industrial and agricultural markets, operates 25 manufacturing and research and development facilities around the world. In 1999, Pliant Corporation's Macedon, NY facility developed onsite presence of a Physical Therapist on a weekly basis.

Occupational Health Professionals have been aware of the benefits of prevention services in controlling worker injury and lost time. Often times, corporate management views these services as an expense rather than an investment in their business and protection of a crucial asset, their employees. The initial charge was to understand and reduce the incidence of upper extremity cumulative trauma. The plant was already very proactive in minimizing ergonomic stressors but needed input regarding how to improve the tolerance of employees for repetitive work.

The overall program has been successful in three ways.

1. There has been a plant wide decrease in recordable injuries from 23 in 1998 to 10 in 2003.
2. The incident rate was 5.3 in 1998 and 2.14 in 2003.
3. Lastly, the turnover rate has been reduced from 26% in 2000 to 13% in 2003, providing savings in the training of new employees.



These results have been achieved over four years through collaboration with plant and department managers, the Safety Manager and the active participation of the employees.

Preventing injuries required multiple levels of assessment and intervention. Ultimately, the greatest improvements occurred when the concepts of putting a worker into the job with the required strength was combined with proper ergonomic conditions, education regarding safe work technique and use of proper stretching and warm up. In retrospect, the job analysis was the most important piece and is now done first when evaluating a job title. The pieces of employee education, work station modification and development of the pre-work screen fall in afterward. This process makes injury prevention easier than the initial interventions which were reactive and more challenging.

Preventing employee injuries is an ongoing endeavor. Employees realize the value that Pliant places on them by bringing the therapist to their workplace. The therapist learned the job stressors and began providing more education on the floor to prevent the soft tissue injuries from occurring altogether. The results have created a very healthy return on the money invested in the program.