Avoid Hiring Your Next Workers’ Compensation Claim: Matching physical capabilities of applicants to physical job demands

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In the moving and storage industry, where competition is fierce and profit margins are thin, only companies that are diligent in controlling costs will be profitable in the long term.

Two major expenses for employers in the moving and storage industry include direct costs and indirect costs associated with Workers’ Compensation insurance. Direct costs include high premiums in the form of high base rates and/or increases in experience modification factors. Indirect costs include costs associated with decreased employee productivity, days off, lost management time due to documenting losses and possible litigation, re-training and new hiring costs. According to a study by the National Council on Compensation Insurance, Inc. (NCCI), the indirect cost of a Workers’ Compensation claim can be a multiple as high as 4.5 times that of the direct cost of the claim.

How to Prevent Claims
Members of the moving and storage industry generally recognize the direct costs associated with Workers’ Compensation claims, and have developed effective safety programs aimed at preventing losses from occurring or mitigating losses after they occur. While these programs are effective at controlling costs and should always be maintained, why not make sure you are hiring applicants whose physical capabilities match the physical demands of the job? This will decrease the risk of an injury due to a pre-existing condition or overall lack of strength.

The Problem – Traditional Testing Methods
Traditionally, employers have used one of two methods for testing the strength of applicants:

- Develop a detailed description of job-related functions and ask the employee whether he or she is capable of handling the tasks. This method depends entirely on the honesty and knowledge of the applicant.
- Develop a post-offer Functional Capacity Evaluation where “conditionally” hired applicants are required to simulate the job in the presence of trained physical therapists or medical personnel. This process can take hours, is very subjective, and can cause injury to the applicant resulting in a Workers’ Compensation or liability claim.

The Answer – Pre-Employment Isokinetic Testing
The failure rate (i.e. percentage of applicants who do not pass) of the above-mentioned testing is 1%. The rejection rate for the pre-employment isokinetic test is 16%. This means that 15% of applicants “unfit” for the job are missed my current testing standards. Implementing isokinetic testing on a pre-employment basis is an extremely effective employment screening tool that will help an employer avoid hiring an applicant incapable of performing the job due to lack of strength or pre-existing conditions. On a completely objective basis, pre-employment strength testing measures the degree to which candidates have the identifiable ability to exert joint torques, which can then be compared to the minimum torques required in a job. Testing of several joints (shoulder, knee and trunk) provides sufficient information to indicate whether a candidate is able to perform the tasks required for a job. In addition to measuring strength, isokinetic testing can uncover pre-existing conditions prior to employment.

Isokinetic testing is favored by medical practitioners, including physical therapists, because of the testing machine’s use of “accommodating resistance.” Accommodating resistance ensures that the muscle load will not exceed the applicant’s ability or tolerance during the test. Simply put, it is not possible to incur a sprain or strain injury while taking an isokinetic test. Avoidance has always been one of the best loss prevention techniques available to employers. Through the implementation of safe and effective pre-employment strength testing, employers can avoid hiring an employee who might incur an extremely costly Workers’ Compensation claim.

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