

BFAWU GUIDE TO BODY MAPPING

One of the cornerstones of the BFAWU health and safety training has been our commitment to preventative measures rather than a reactionary response when it comes to dealing with accidents and occupational ill health.

If we are to prevent accidents we need to look at the root causes such as contact with machinery, spills on floors, incorrect PPE, inadequate training etc. Once identified we put in place corrective measures that if implemented, will reduce the risk of injury.

Likewise when it comes to the risk of strains, sprains, back pain, asthma, dermatitis and other occupational aches, pains and illnesses, we need to look at the root causes. Of course sometimes the root causes are not so obvious and so we need to use other streams of information to evidence some of the problems. In particular when it is difficult to establish the link between work and illness.

This is where Body Mapping will become useful

There are a number of reasons why some illnesses and injuries do not come to light and as to why workers fail to complain:

- **Some of the aches and pains we experience we put down to getting older or a change in lifestyle that has reduced our fitness. Keeping it to ourselves when there is a possibility that our co-workers are experiencing the same type of discomfort.**
- **There will be workers who will not make a fuss for fear of losing their job.**
- **It may be that they are happy with the people they work with and would not want to be moved elsewhere.**
- **Some fail to report any problem with the job and resultant aches, particularly when lifting is involved for fear of being seen as weak or in some way inadequate to their colleagues.**
- **There are also some major difficulties in deciding whether or not the symptoms are work related or down to wear and tear. Is the pain in the back down to lifting or twisting at work or was it the gardening the week before?**

Whilst the list is not meant to be exhaustive, it is meant to highlight some of the difficulties facing health and safety representatives and the employer when it comes to identification.

One of the major benefits of adopting Body Mapping as a preventative measure is that it gets the workforce talking about the direct relationship between work and health. Many companies already use this health and safety tool with success within their Occupational Health departments.

Body Mapping if run correctly can help to identify clusters of similar health problems amongst groups of workers doing similar roles and can therefore help to identify causation.

So how does Body Mapping work?

The first thing to say is that it is an easy concept to use involving the outline of the **human body** both front and back, very much like the example shown here.

We give particular groups of illnesses and injuries colour codes, for example:

- **RED for aches and pains.**
- **GREEN for illness, stomach problems, dermatitis etc**
- **BLUE for cuts bruises and abrasions.**

- **BLACK** for other symptoms such as headache, breathing difficulties etc.

The colours are only to enable us to differentiate and are interchangeable as are the symptoms put into each group. Providing that there is consistency in the way they are laid out it should make no difference.

Then using corresponding coloured pens or stickers we then encourage the workers in the particular job or department in which we are carrying out the analysis, to put a mark on the chart to identify the areas of the body they find discomfort or pain whilst they are working.

Whilst a Body Mapping programme can be done on a one to one basis it is probably better to get a group of like workers to use an enlarged map together as it may be easier to highlight common problems and practical solutions if they are airing their problems collectively.

It is important that when the worker puts their coloured mark on the chart that they also write down what their individual problem is.

- We should encourage as many people to take part as is possible.
- They should be doing like jobs e.g. All lifting baskets or all using icing bags etc if we are to get accurate data from the survey. Compare like with like.
- Ask the workers to look at what they believe could remedy their problems, rather than just leaving it to the Safety Representatives on site.
- Always revisit findings at a later date to enable comparison and the measurement of any improvement strategy put in place.
- Share findings to as wide an audience as possible within the workplace. If people know what happened and any benefits derived they will be more likely to participate in future.

If this strategy is run correctly then the benefits to all will soon become apparent. From a membership point of view fewer members will be hurt or suffer occupational illness at work and that has to be our chief aim.

For the employer there are likely to be many benefits. There would be fewer claims made against their insurance, greater efficiencies and productivity on the lines because the workers trained to do the job are on the job and of course the very fact that doing the job correctly is often the least time consuming.

Further information is available from BFAWU Head Office 01707 260150

THE BFAWU PUTTING PREVENTION BEFORE CURE