

Obese Workers Cost You More than Smokers



Obesity costs employers more than smokers, according to a study in the *March Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. Researchers analyzed the incremental costs of smoking and obesity among more than 30,000 Mayo Clinic workers and retirees with continuous health insurance coverage between 2001 and 2007.

Not surprisingly, both groups cost more to insure than normal weight workers who didn't smoke. But while smokers generated \$1,275 (USD) more in incremental annual costs vis-à-vis nonsmokers, the difference between obese and normal weight workers was even higher—to the tune of \$1,850 (USD). And the incremental difference tripled to \$5,500 (USD) per year for workers who were morbidly obese.

Obesity & Safety

Obesity can not only impact employer health costs but also workplace safety. Another study shows that work-related injuries are far more costly if the injured worker is obese. The dramatically higher medical costs suggest that the types and nature of injuries sustained by obese workers—especially the morbidly obese—are more likely to result in permanent disabilities.

The study looked at the differences in outcomes between workplace injuries suffered by obese and non-obese workers' comp claimants. The researchers concluded that there's greater risk that injuries will create permanent disabilities if the injured worker is obese. And even when both the obese claim and non-obese claim are for the same injury type, the range of medical treatments and costs, as well as duration, typically is greater for obese claimants.

Managing Overweight Workers

Click [here](#) for information on how to manage and protect overweight workers without violating human rights laws that bar discrimination. For example, click [here](#) to take a quiz on treating workers adversely because of their weight. And click [here](#) for a report from Statistics Canada on the prevalence of obesity among adults in Canada and the US.

OHS Insider Pro members can also watch a recorded webinar on managing overweight workers.