

Safety Training and the Bottom Line

Who is more likely to experience an on the job injury in your veterinary practice, a new employee with less than one year of experience or an employee with more than one year of experience? California's Department of Industrial Relations statistics from 2015, indicate that employees with one or more years' experience were involved in 72 percent of nonfatal injuries resulting in days away from work, compared to 28 percent of employees working for less than one year.

(Source: California Department of Industrial Relations, total cases = 470,000)

Experienced employees are injured twice as often as new employees, but they also outnumber new employees in the workplace. When statistics show that 1 in 3 new employees are injured on the job within the first year of employment, perhaps it's worth asking, "How thorough is my new hire safety training and supervision when it comes to ensuring new hires aren't attempting to exceed their skills and abilities?"

Here are a few reasons to invest in consistent and thorough employee safety training:

Element of Risk

Every veterinary practice has risks, whether working with small pets or large animals. An untrained assistant may use improper techniques and find it difficult to "read" or anticipate an animal's behavior and cannot protect the patient and themselves from injury.

A new employee having years of veterinary experience may not use restraint and treatment techniques their new practice uses. Training an experienced veterinary technician/assistant is as important as training a new employee with no prior experience. A level of complacency or overconfidence can contribute to an injury.

Safety Training Increases Productivity

Your investment in training does provide returns. Think of it as a profit center. When injuries are prevented, there is no claim, thus experience modification factors and workers' compensation premiums won't be influenced by these claims that don't occur. Employees are more productive using standards of care that are proven effective. Time away from work for medical treatment and lost time from the injury are avoided.

Employees who feel that they are valued because you care for their health and safety by providing training will treat customers well in return. Taking the time to show your interest in their safety is one way to build a loyal staff, and a loyal staff has positive effects on many facets of the veterinary practice.

Regulatory Compliance

Cal/OSHA General Industry Safety Order 3203 – Injury & Illness Prevention Program requires a practice to provide general and job specific safety training. Regardless of experience, safety training for new and experienced employees in a veterinary practice does prevent injuries.

Cal/OSHA General Industry Safety Order 3203 includes the following:

- New employees are to be trained when hired (general safety training) and when assigned a job (specific safety training).
- Existing employees are to be trained when given a new job, or whenever new substances, processes, procedures, or equipment are introduced to them or into the practice.

If Cal/OSHA Enforcement inspects your practice, they will ask to see general and job specific training records for employees. Failure to provide the training and documentation may result in citation and fine.

Indirect Costs Savings

Direct costs from an injury are accrued in medical costs and lost time workers' compensation payments. Indirect costs aren't covered by insurance but are borne by the practice. These are easily identified if your practice has ever had a work injury. They include disruptions to work schedules, scheduling delays, lost productivity, repairing damaged equipment, low employee morale, and increased absenteeism. It is found that the indirect costs of an injury can be 4 to 20 times greater than the direct costs. If employees are taking risks they shouldn't be, it will have an economic impact on your practice.

The CVMA InLine website (cvma-inline.net) provides both practice safety and regulatory compliance tools to help you train employees and meet legal requirements. Training equips employees with the tools to work safely in your practice and promotes greater customer satisfaction. It is an investment that you will see on the bottom line! ■