

Loss of Physical and Cognitive Capacity

- Loss of cognitive capacity leads to errors and injuries particularly in the heavy industrial and construction industries
- Over complacency is a problem with the older worker who feels that he/she has been doing it “his/her” way and that is/was good enough
- Endurance is a problem from a physical standpoint; managers/supervisors sometimes can see an older employee’s endurance dropping
- Their sharpness goes down
- Loss of endurance at end of shift – failure
Affect of higher production rates and new products? How to teach an old dog new tricks (nicely)
- One of the drivers in this problem is understanding the impact in the change in demographics to more older workers
- Older workers that feel threatened by younger, new hires will develop self-limitations on their work
- Speed at which older workers are able to do their jobs (production / maintenance)
- How much of this problem is inevitable or are there things that can be done to slow the effect of aging
- There are more longer-lasting injuries that the older worker does not always acknowledge; they are slower to heal; and often don’t get early intervention
- Older workers are using 20 year old office furniture in 15 year old facilities; in other words they often will not give up tried and true surroundings/equipment/way of doing things when all around them has been “modernized”
- Applicability of/impact of: automated financial transactions and errors
- Expected work/production rates remain the same even though there are fewer and older workers (effect of downsizing)
- Need for awareness/education on the aging process
- The culture glorified youth – where do we (aging workers) fit in?
- Establish the link between wellness programs and injury rates: number of accidents and seriousness of accidents
- Link wellness programs, such as strength & balance; flexibility; cardiovascular to safety incentive programs
- Problems of a non-worker friendly plant; with the average age of 47 there is a new level of ergonomics
- In a facility where the average age is 54, the older worker often gets the softer jobs
- What is the effect of lifestyles, such as older workers becoming more overweight; should free memberships to health clubs be offered
- Question of wellness vs. lifestyle vs. job/task assignment
- In natural gas industry experience has been trying to convince older workers to slow down – ask for help equipment/tool re-design

- Older worker attitude is often that there has always been a standard operating procedure and now employers are bringing in things such as ergonomics
- Often, once reprimanded for a problem/error, the older worker will then not admit to it again
- Downsizing means more overtime, but longer working days
- Construction industry still requires heavy lift/work no matter how old
- Safety professionals don't understand older workers as much as they should – education on aging is needed
- There are differences in values and beliefs of older workers vs. younger workers

Role of Experience

- Rubbing off factor of older workers on younger workers – is this a + or - ?
- Problems with older workers who had done something a certain way years ago, now have to relearn, particularly in a downsizing organization
- In some industries there is reluctance of the older worker to listen to a younger person and even worse, a younger woman
- Older workers feel that they have used their experience well, but now there are diminishing returns on experience
- The employer faces the potential of losing the history and experience on the retirement of older workers
- If experience is walking out the door; when and where will the replacement workforce come from
- Is there as much of a problem concerning aging in the senior management of the organization?
- Does the experience contributed by an older worker in a management position offset losses that may be experienced by his/her aging
- It is easier for an experienced worker to convince management personnel that they need help
- There is less frequent injury when the employee is sedentary
- When older workers are replaced (if they are); the new staff members will be inexperienced
- Role of “retired”/“older” consultants who have been downsized but re-hired as consultants
- Can “retired” older workers mentor apprentice programs; can they be kept on part time employment
- There needs to be better planning for replacements
- Experience can bolster negative aspects of new and younger employees

- Head count issues – will older workers self-select out to contract workforce

Accommodations

- Fall hazards increase with age; walking / working surfaces become important
- Lighting
- Hand-made lifting tools; non-engineered material handling tools: older workers have re-made or “adjusted” tools to accommodate their needs
- Noise – hearing protection
- Surface markings
- Accommodations when back injuries become more prevalent
- Need for more flexible work hours
- Problem of some older workers who simply do not or will not accommodate
- At what age or point do you in reality have an older workforce; cannot always go by regulatory/legislative generalized numbers

Research - What Is Needed/What Do We Define

- Impact of overtime on older workers
- Effect of wellness and work hardening programs increase physical capacity of worker
- Training of safety professionals to better understand/accommodate older workers
- What accommodations vis a vis ADA and other regulations/legislation are needed?
- Need a better answer for what is an older worker
- Need to increase the baseline for physical capacity/capabilities
- Discrimination concern
- Work capacity may not be age-determined
- How many older workers are working beyond capacity