

CPH News and Views

A semi-monthly column on emerging topics related to healthy workplaces

Issue 64: Total Worker Health – an integrated approach to a healthier workplace

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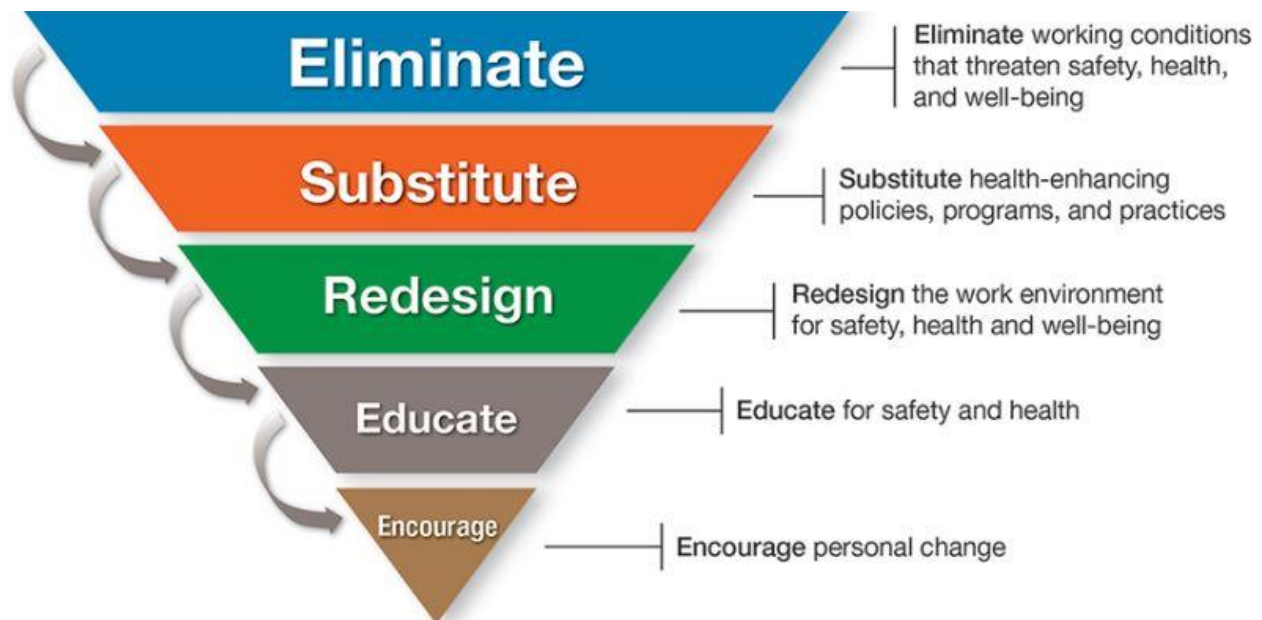
On average, employed US adults spend more than half of their waking lives working or engaging in related activities ([BLS, 2018](#)). Scientific evidence now shows there are occupational risk factors for sleep disorders, cardiovascular disease, depression, obesity, and other common health conditions ([NIOSH, 2018](#)). Likewise, our work has a large impact on how we maintain our health. That's why worker well-being is relevant for workers and employers, and why *Total Worker Health*® can set the stage for worker safety, health and well-being on and off the job.

What is “Total Worker Health?”

Total Worker Health (TWH) is an emerging program concept that takes occupational safety and health to the next level to include other workforce health concerns such as stress, chronic diseases, and working and living well into older age. Total Worker Health is not a wellness program with a new name. Keeping workers safe is the foundation upon which a TWH approach is built. TWH *integrates* workplace safety efforts with a broad spectrum of opportunities and interventions to improve overall worker health and well-being, as shown in Figure 1.

A TWH approach to workplace well-being focuses on making work organization and the working environment conducive to health. Worker well-being is affected by factors such as the physical and chemical work environment, psychosocial conditions in the workplace, the home and community environment, and personal health behaviors. Therefore, a Total Worker Health approach address both the conditions of work and the symptoms of poor health as part of an integrated wellbeing strategy.

Figure 1: Hierarchy of Controls applied to NIOSH TWH



Examples of an *integrated*, Total Worker Health approach to workplace safety

Health & Safety concern	Total Worker Health approach
Respiratory illnesses from poor workplace air quality can be more serious for smokers.	Improve air quality AND help employees quit smoking
Job stress increases the risk factors for heart disease such as high blood pressure, smoking, low physical activity, and anxiety/depression.	Reduce work-related stressors AND Help employees develop skills and habits for exercise, eating well, and managing stress
Physically demanding work can lead to feeling too fatigued to exercise or to prepare healthy meals.	Provide equipment to reduce bodily forces AND Plan work schedules to allow for rest and recovery

Simple ways to introduce a Total Worker Health approach

NIOSH outlines [essential elements](#) of a Total Worker Health program (NIOSH, 2017). The examples below outline a few simple steps to begin adopting these elements.

Design for healthier work

- Re-organize work to minimize repetitive motion, excessive force, and awkward postures.
- Plan shift schedules that allow workers to have sufficient sleep quality and quantity.

Engage workers in assessment and program implementation activities

- Involve employees in assessing work and non-work sources of health concerns.
- Empower employees to identify and solve problems that impact their well-being.
- Get employee feedback on workplace changes before rolling them out.

Integrate relevant systems to advance worker well-being

- Encourage coordinated goal-setting and cooperation between health and safety, wellness, benefits, training, and employee assistance programs.

Selected resources from TWH Centers for Excellence

<https://www.uml.edu/Research/CPH-NEW/Resources/TWH.aspx>

Selected research resources from NIOSH Total Worker Office

<https://www.uml.edu/Research/CPH-NEW/Resources/NIOSH.aspx>

TWH professional development resources

TWH [“On-demand” education](#) and [degree or certification programs](#)

References

1. US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), American Time Use Survey, <https://www.bls.gov/charts/american-time-use/activity-by-work.htm>
2. CDC, NIOSH Total Worker Health (2020) <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/twh/totalhealth.html>
3. CDC, NIOSH Fundamentals of Total Worker Health Approaches: Essential Elements for Advancing Worker Safety, Health, and Well-Being, <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2017-112/>

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