

MONITORING A SAFE WORKPLACE – BODY MAPPING



Background

Unions are concerned about the number of work-related incidents, injuries and illnesses that occur in workplaces. They arise from many factors including the design of work processes, the use of material and substances and work organisation.

Many hazards are obvious and the health and safety effect can be immediate. However, there are many hidden hazards which members are exposed to that are difficult to identify and can have an adverse effect on health.

One way to easily identify these hidden hazards is to use body mapping and hazard mapping techniques.

The mapping processes allow members to collectively gather information about their workplace and to discuss who, why, where, when and how to what has been identified and decide what is important and the solutions to improve the situation.

Body mapping

Introduction

We do not tend to be very open at work about our health and some people dismiss aches and pains as 'part of growing older', or 'just part of the job'.

Body mapping is a way of overcoming this and identifying common patterns of health problems amongst workers doing the same job or at a particular workplace. Whilst it is not certain that any such common ailments are work-related, it highlights areas for further investigation.

Mapping has been used as a teaching and organising tool for many years. The effectiveness of mapping lies in the fact that:

- It involves workers and it shows them that they are not alone
- It gets people thinking about their workplace in a new way
- Its use of visual images help workers identify problems
- It allows members to have ownership.

It is up to each person and how much they want to discuss with the group. Participation is completely voluntary.

It is important to remember confidentiality when this kind of personal information is being gathered. The maps may be used to show the joint health and safety committee or the employer what health and safety problems the members are experiencing. So, no names or any other identifiers should be used on the maps to protect the participants' privacy.

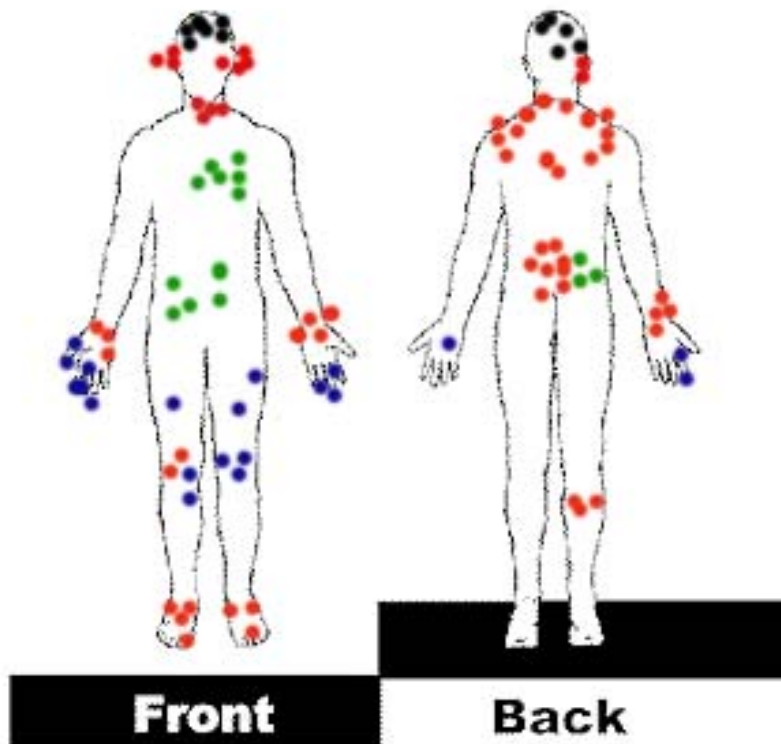
MONITORING A SAFE WORKPLACE – BODY MAPPING



Nuts and Bolts

There is nothing difficult in body mapping. You start with the front and back body outlines. Body Mapping does not require sophisticated materials. Any large piece of paper with a very rough sketch of a body will do. Any pens or markers will do. Members are then asked to put a sticker, or a coloured mark onto the body map to show any symptoms that they may have.

Body Map



It is a good idea to use different colours to identify different symptoms, eg

- red - aches and pains
- blue - cuts and bruises
- green - illnesses
- black - anything else (eg stress)

MONITORING A SAFE WORKPLACE – BODY MAPPING



You can apply dots for any health problems or injuries you are experiencing now or have experienced since you have been working.

These should include aches and pains, chronic illnesses, injuries or symptoms that you believe are caused or affected by your work.

You can put psychosocial problems such as stress, sleeping difficulties, anxiety or fatigue in a circle over the head. If you can't show your problems with dots, for example if you have generalised pain or a skin rash over a large part of your body, a marker to draw can be used.

By comparing the different symptoms of members working in the same area, or doing the same tasks, you can identify common patterns.

Possible causes of symptoms

Once you have found the symptoms, you then need to look at possible causes – remember that these may not be work related: but the more members reporting the same symptoms, the more likely it becomes that the work or working environment is a factor.

The next part of this mapping exercise, involves individuals identifying the health problems that their dots represent and discussing the possible causes of their health problems and solutions. Small notes can also be made on the side of the outline. This information and findings are discussed with co-workers and it is important that you keep a record of identified problems.

The table below offers a selection of possible symptoms and causes

BODY AREA	SYMPTOMS	POSSIBLE WORK CAUSES
Head	anxiety, depression, sleeplessness, irritability	some solvents, shift work, work load, bullying
Eyes	redness, irritation, dryness, watering	dust, air quality/humidity, computer screens (lack of eye tests or breaks), chemical exposure
Ears	hearing loss	noise from headsets or machinery
Nose and Throat	sneezing, coughing, dryness, soreness, hoarseness	air quality/humidity, dust, voice loss (overuse in eg call centres)
Neck and Back	soreness, pain, stiffness	poor posture and equipment or job design, inadequate breaks, work load
Chest and Lungs	wheezing, shortness of breath	dusty environment, chemical exposure
Arms, Wrists and Hands	soreness pins & needles, loss of sensation in fingertips, burns and cuts	poor ergonomics, repetitive work, hot material, inadequate equipment eg knives
Legs and Knees	stiffness, aches and pains	walking/standing for long periods, getting on/off forklift
Feet and Ankles	cold, numbness, pain	cold environment, safety boots