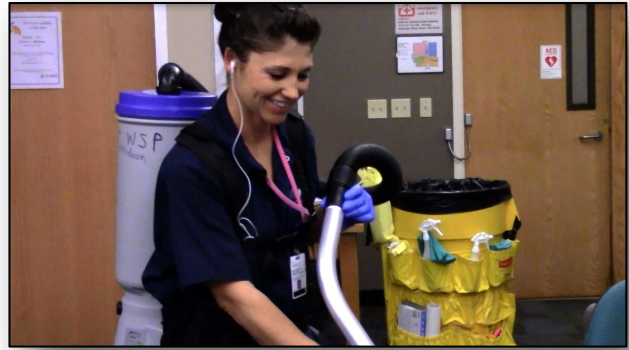


# RESULTS WASHINGTON CASE STUDY: Saving Employees from Injuries

*Making a safer workplace.* The Department of Enterprise Services (DES) has overhauled custodial procedures, sharply reducing the number of serious injuries on the job. The Department of Enterprise Services

DES, among many other duties, provides custodial services at many state buildings. These jobs – vacuuming, lifting, cleaning – were leading to a high number of on-the-job injuries. On average, 20 to 25 percent of workers were getting hurt on the job each year. One third of the injuries were serious or severe.

“That really wasn’t acceptable, so we set out to do something about that,” said Facilities Support Services Manager Cory Noffsinger.



The agency formed a Lean safety team of DES custodial staff to identify hazards and look for potential improvements in the daily work of staff members. They started off by looking at injury records.

*“That really wasn’t acceptable, so we set out to do something about that.”*

*- Cory Noffsinger*

“What we discovered is that we have lots of different kinds of injuries all the time, from some that are very minor all the way up to serious accidents,” said Noffsinger.

More than 70 percent of injuries occurred while vacuuming or handling trash or supplies. Nearly half the injuries were strains or sprains. After analyzing the data and seeing what kind of injuries were most common, the team set a target of zero serious or severe injuries.



The team then observed employees at work in order to better understand where injuries could and do occur. They did “go-sees,” which are exactly what they sound like: going to see the work being done. This helped the injury reduction team target problems and potential hazards.

They found that exhaustion was a big part of on-the-job injuries, with long shifts and fatigue from wearing heavy backpack vacuums.

“Some of the storage and supply areas weren’t designed to help support a safe workplace,” said Noffsinger. “We discovered that we didn’t necessarily have the right equipment or tools to do the work.”

Safety training was also a factor, with workers and supervisors typically only trained once in safe work practices.



**Improvements:** The team came up with a number of changes, including new training procedures and a new meeting format focused on safety.

“Previously, when custodians were hired, they received training then – that was it, as far as safety goes,” said Noffsinger. “That’s not the case anymore, now we have a system to make sure each person is going to be as safe as possible and injury free while at work.”

Staff also redesigned and reorganized storage and supply areas, and began testing different equipment.

“It’s been really empowering, and the staff are looking for next steps to further the impact of the safety training,” said Noffsinger.

**Outcome:** The rate of serious or severe injuries has fallen to zero. Staff members are working in a safer environment.

“We haven’t had a serious or severe injury since March of 2016,” Noffsinger said in a recent interview.

The team also learned some key lessons about Lean management. They saw first-hand the value of going to see the work being done when solving problems. They learned the value of taking the time to grasp the situation and the value of focused improvement efforts. They also saw the value of front-line workers as a crucial resource for improvement ideas and testing.

DES has also widely implemented visual management techniques, which helps surface safety concerns.

“Without our employees, we fail,” said Noffsinger. “We want them safe, we want them to be able to come to work, and most of all we want them to be able to go home to their families and live their lives and not have to live with an injury that they’ve suffered at work.”



Department of Enterprise Services  
Lean Custodial Safety Team