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During the 2009 Drillovation conference held in Bunker Bay (Western Australia), several delegates held discussions with Mark Armstrong (Director and Founder of BAC) following his presentation on manual handling and the challenge which currently faces the drilling industry in this area. Run by the MDAA, the symposium also attracted a number of ADIA members.

The topic of conversation almost exclusively related to the ongoing struggle with manual handling based sprain and strain injuries in the drilling industry throughout Australia. For decades now, the industry has seemingly developed something of an 'immunity' to all manner of initiatives and interventions in this specific area. This could be a consequence of the general perception of safety practitioners by the drilling industry highlighted recently in the last edition of *Australasian Drilling* in the article by Ian Speer.

Mark believes this is because of the lack of understanding as to what is available in the marketplace and how this relates specifically to drilling organisations. There is also a very important question which many people ask: 'What is the benefit to me as an owner of a drilling business?' This aligns itself with that famous old saying (which is always so true) - what is in it for me?

On those rare occasions where positive impacts have been recorded in the drilling industry, with respect to the effective prevention of sprain and strain injuries, they are all too often a mere scratch on the surface of an ongoing and serious challenge that faces the industry as a whole.

So the seeds of an idea were duly planted, and efforts to develop a comprehensive competency based manual handling training program, specifically for the drilling industry, began in earnest.

This journey has now been ten months in the making, and working collaboratively with various identities such as DrillSkill Training, we are in the process of finalising a package of customised training specifically designed and built for the drilling industry. This is aimed primarily at the prevention of sprain and strain injuries for all employees, but specifically drillers and their offsiders.

Note – given many bad habits often develop from recreational activities, it would seem advantageous for every employee to go through the fundamental aspects of safe manual handling.

One of the biggest obstacles to a successful manual handling program in the drilling industry is a direct result of the majority of the industry being hyper-incentivised in a monetary sense. A large number of jobs in the drilling industry have wage or salary incentives structured on meeting daily drilling production targets, which has a distinctly hazardous side effect on shifting priorities away from health and safety concerns and towards a bigger pay day. i.e. PRODUCTION before safety!!

This may as well be a green light to take short-cuts, and short-cuts tend to have a strong relationship with accidents and injuries.

A second aspect is that few rigs have any auxiliary lifting devices, apart from the main hoist itself. For example, few sites provide sufficient room or surface conditions for forklifts? Only a small no. of rigs carry a Hyab-type boom for heavier items! So manual handling of some heavier items – often across rough surfaces – is

unavoidable and inevitable. Again the focus of improvements on rigs seems to be on the automation of the rod-handling process while acknowledged as a major concern with respect to injury is not the only ergonomic issue with drill rigs!

Getting a comprehensive manual handling accident/injury prevention program up and running successfully requires a high level of coordination and commitment from both the company and the service providers. It rarely happens unless the General Manager makes a 100% no-exceptions policy to change the way we have traditionally operated and functioned because he understands the potential ongoing benefits. Therein lies an education process all of its own.

In far too many cases, this unfortunately means convincing the company 'bean counters' that the program is an investment in the workforce rather than an expense, which often requires demonstrations of 'bottom line' benefits that are not always immediately obvious or indeed readily available for reasons previously touched on.

However, you would think that the cost of workcover premiums, direct accident/injury costs including rehabilitation was more than sufficient evidence?

The Drillistic program, once fully developed, has very clearly identified the following benefits the program will deliver to both a company and its workforce.

## FEATURES:

- Better assessment of candidates in the pre-employment process – that is to ensure that there is a satisfactory physical match to the work they will be doing.
- Reduced incidence of sprains and strains – programs of physical adaptation to the work tasks to lessen the physical impact and extend the life of the drillers and offsiders particularly.
- Pro-active ongoing manual handling educational programs to better inform the workforce on how to look after themselves and consequently reduce the impact on the ageing worker.

## BENEFITS:

- Reduction in accidents and injuries
- Less interruption to production
- Fewer works compensation claims (and costs)
- Better prepared employees
- More resilient employees
- Lower overall employment costs
- Less physical, mental and social stress on employees (happier!!)
- Seen as being pro-active by clients
- Reduced workers compensation premium, and in some cases, initiatives supported by the insurer.

**BAC has already commenced some pre-testing of the program's components with a view to expanding on the program details in the next edition of *Australasian Drilling* and as a lead up to a practical presentation at the **Drill 2010** conference to be held in Adelaide during September.**