

	<h2>Use of Back Belts</h2>	Effective:	February 24, 2006
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1. Purpose:

The purpose of this policy and its discussion is to explain the use of back belts, their value and risk to an employee and the policy of the University regarding their use.

2. Scope:

This policy applies to all Ross University faculty and staff and the attached discussion is intended for their education in the issues concerning back belt use.

3. Procedure

3.1. Use of a back belt shall be at the discretion of the employee, subject to the approval of their supervisor, according to the rationale of the following discussion.

3.2. Any lifting injury in a department should lead to a departmental review of employee lifting training by the Ross University Safety & Security Dept.

4. Discussion of on-the-job use of back belts by Ross University employees.

What Are Back Belts?

Back belts are wide belts that encircle the abdomen and lower back. They are usually made of elastic material and can be cinched tightly around the waist, like a girdle, when one is ready to lift something heavy. They often have suspenders that hold them in place when they are not cinched tightly. They have become popular with workers in jobs that require heavy lifting; for example, warehouse workers or longshoremen, baggage handlers, and stocking clerks.

Claims for Back Belts

Proponents of back belts claim that they prevent back injuries by various means, including reducing internal forces on the spine during lifting, increasing intra-abdominal pressure which counters the forces on the spine, stiffening the spine which decreases forces on the spine, restricting bending range of motion to prevent overextending, and reminding the wearer to lift carefully. They claim that back belts have reduced injuries in the workplace.

Scientific Support

Unfortunately, none of the above claims has been conclusively proven to date, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), which has continued to review the scientific literature on the effects of back belts. NIOSH also has

concerns that use of back belts can lead workers to lift more than they should because of a sense of security, putting them at greater risk of injury.

Due to the inconsistent and unproven effects of back belts, NIOSH does not recommend the use of back belts to prevent injuries while lifting. Instead, they recommend that employers implement an ergonomics program that reviews the work environment and work tasks to identify the hazards of lifting. Training workers in identifying lifting hazards and using safe lifting techniques and methods is the most effective way to reduce lifting injuries.

Ross University Position:

Ross University Safety & Security Dept. concurs with NIOSH and does not support the use of back belts nor consider back belts to be personal protective equipment for the following reasons:

- Back belts have not been shown to protect employees from back injuries.
- They do not protect people when using improper lifting methods.
- They cannot replace the necessary physical conditioning needed for the job.
- They will not provide support for lifting loads beyond a person's normal capabilities.

Recommendations for Supervisors:

If an employee feels a back belt is needed to safely perform the job,

- Evaluate the work area and method to see if changes can be made to reduce loads to the back. Consult Ross University Safety & Security, Ext. 191/215, if assistance is needed.
- Provide employees with training in back injury prevention.
- Have the employee discuss medical reasons for needing a back belt, with Ross University Safety & Security, Ext. 191 or Campus Nurse, Ext. 135.

If you decide to wear a back belt at work or at home, it is very important that you understand that:

- You should always consult your health care provider before wearing a back belt if you are receiving medical care for back symptoms.
- There is evidence of adverse health effects from wearing a tight back belt for prolonged periods. Tighten the belt only for short periods.
- Long-term use of a back belt may increase your risk of back injury when you stop wearing the belt.
- You should always continue to use safe lifting techniques while wearing a back belt.
- EH&S offers training classes, literature, and videos on back injury prevention.