

## Reviews of Articles

### Employers Speak Out on Back Supports

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Results of an early 1994 survey of employers using back supports shows that a majority of those responding have had positive results and want to continue to use them in their safety programs.

The study was sent to 1,600 employers by the marketing consulting firm John Alden Associates of Holden, MA. Results were reported in this article by company president A. J. McNamara.

"A total of 301 firms responded, for an 18.6 percent response rate," writes McNamara. Among the conclusions were:

employers want any future OSHA standards to provide the option of using back supports,

a continuous and intensive training program in back safety is important along with the supports in companies reporting reduced injury claims,

three-fourths of the companies responding to the survey say they have seen the number of injury claims drop, and

wider style belts were more commonly used by companies reporting reduced claims, but claims were still reduced using a variety of brands and styles.

The survey asked the question: "Since you started using back belts have your claims for back injuries gone down?"

Of the 86 who said they had gotten results at the time of the survey, 76 percent reported their claims had dropped while 24 percent did not see a reduction.

One comment from this group said "Claims [were] reduced by 80 percent and maintained over three years!"

Responses to this question from 84 companies were that they needed more time to find out what results they were getting. Another 24 companies said that they "honestly don't know."

Another question asked about the type of belt used in the company. Respondents using supports said they favored the wider "corset" style and 22 percent used both wide and narrow "weightlifter" styles. Five percent reported using only the narrow style.

Companies who said that use of back supports should be an option for employers in any federal or state standards also replied that "use of back belts is not a silver bullet single solution to the very complex problem of back injuries."

Many comments stressed that back supports should be used with proper training methods and that they are a valuable reminder about proper lifting in this case.

Critics fell into several groups, including those who believe they should only be used when prescribed by a doctor, those who worry about possible negative side effects, and those looking for more research results.

"Last and perhaps most important, use of back belts should be placed within the context of a broad program of proper lift training, supported by positive, pro-active management," is the comment from many critics--as well as employers using them with success.