



TOTAL WORKER HEALTH®

A NEW MODEL FOR WELL-BEING AT WORK

What is *Total Worker Health*?

Most employers want to keep their workers safe and healthy at work. However, they may not see how the job itself—the characteristics of the work, how it is designed and completed each day—can also play an important part in their workers' health, well-being, and performance. In 2011, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) launched the *Total Worker Health* (TWH) program to explore how work can be better designed to both protect workers from harm on the job and enhance their overall health and well-being. CDC defines *Total Worker Health* as “policies, programs, and practices that integrate protection from work-related safety and health hazards with promotion of injury and illness prevention efforts to advance worker well-being.”¹

While employers are required to protect workers from hazards and unhealthy exposures at work, the TWH approach encourages organizations to do more. TWH efforts emphasize organization-level interventions over individual ones, concentrating on workplace policies, programs, and practices that address the job design and workplace conditions (such as workload, leadership and management practices, work schedules and shifts, wages and benefits, employment arrangements). Increasingly, these factors are connected to risks for work-related injury; acute and chronic diseases; quality of life, job attendance and productivity, and health-related costs for workers and their employers.²

To optimize the TWH approach, workers at all levels of the organization—frontline employees, midlevel managers, and senior leadership—must be engaged and participate. Involving employees in decision-making about their own work conditions and health challenges is vital in planning and maintaining programs over time, and ensuring buy in and engagement among workers.

Taking a comprehensive approach to worker well-being by connecting and coordinating worker safety and health programs and interventions within organizations, and integrating programs wherever possible is also central to the TWH approach.

Why are *Total Worker Health* Approaches Important?

Research has shown that working conditions and other factors at work can play a role in the long-term health of employees.³ To date, studies have linked working conditions and certain industries and occupations to a number of health conditions including depression,^{4,5} obesity,^{6,7} heart disease,^{8,9} and type 2 diabetes.¹⁰ These illnesses can lead to work absences and early disability, and they can decrease individual lifetime earnings and productivity.

By considering working conditions as important determinants of health, the TWH approach seeks to improve the overall health and well-being of workers and their families. Below are some of the benefits achievable when using TWH approaches:

- **Integrating safety and health efforts to have greater impact.** A Harvard study of blue-collar workers, in 15 mid- and large-size manufacturing worksites, showed that the smoking quit rate more than doubled with the addition of worksite occupational safety and health program to a smoking cessation effort, compared to those receiving only the smoking cessation intervention alone.¹¹
- **Healthier workplace policies can lower injury risks.** In a NIOSH study, workers with access to paid sick leave were 28% less likely than workers without access to paid sick leave to be injured on the job. While the association between paid sick leave and occupational injury varied across sectors and occupations, the greatest differences occurred in high-risk occupations.¹²
- **Increased employee involvement in worksite health programs, such as through safety and well-being committees.** Encouraging workers to get involved with identifying issues and concerns and with the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs helps to:
 - » Identify safety and health issues that are most important to frontline employees.

- » Detect and reduce barriers to participation.
- » Increase employee support for and participation in the program activities in the long run.¹³
- **Decreased rate of illness and fewer missed days of work due to illness or injury.**
 - » In one study, adjustments to shift work schedules resulted in an 8% decline in workers' compensation claims rates.¹⁴
 - » In another study, workers who received flu shots without out-of-pocket costs had 29% fewer missed days of work.¹⁵
 - » Employers with a *Total Worker Health* program had \$114–\$146 lower health care coverage costs per employee than those without such a program.¹⁵
- **Increased effectiveness of worksite programs to improve worker health.** Studies of TWH interventions (such as rest, walk and stretch breaks, healthy meeting policies, flexible work schedules, improved ergonomic designs to work spaces, and work stress interventions) have shown positive improvements in health among participants, including:
 - » An average of 7.8-pound weight loss over a six-month period and slowing of unwanted weight gain among employees.
 - » Lower systolic blood pressure measures by at least 6 mm/Hg, and up to 12.7 mm/Hg.
 - » Lower total cholesterol levels by 5.9 mg/dL.¹⁴
- **A happier, less stressful workplace.**
 - » Workers felt more appreciated and supported when their employers prioritized making work healthier and safer.¹⁶
- **Reduced turnover among workers.**
 - » A study by the World Economic Forum found that, among employees who reported that their workplaces were active promoters of health, 64% of employees intended to stay at least five years, and only 5% intended to stay for less than one year. The respective figures were 42% and 20% among employees who reported that their organizations did not actively promote health and well-being.¹⁷

Implementing *Total Worker Health* strategies

While launching a comprehensive approach may seem overwhelming, there are simple steps organizations can follow to begin. [Fundamentals of *Total Worker Health*® Approaches: Essential Elements for Advancing Worker Safety, Health, and Well-Being](#) is a practical starting point for employers, workers, labor representatives, and other professionals interested in aligning their workplace safety and health program with the *Total Worker Health* approach.

Fundamentals of *Total Worker Health*® Approaches

Essential Elements for Advancing
Worker Safety, Health, and Well-Being



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health



The workbook focuses on five Defining Elements of TWH:

1. Demonstrate **leadership commitment to worker safety and health at all levels** of the workplace (at the same level as quality of services and products).
2. Design work to **eliminate or reduce safety and health hazards and promote worker well-being** (by prioritizing worker safety).
3. Promote and support **worker engagement** (i.e., involvement of workers from all levels) throughout program design and implementation.

4. Ensure **confidentiality and privacy of workers** by keeping individual employee's information confidential, and not penalizing workers for their health conditions.
5. **Integrate relevant systems** to advance worker well-being. Coordinating efforts for program and policy across divisions or departments (e.g., human resources or facilities) can help save time and money and can increase the effectiveness of the program.¹⁶

The workbook includes guidance and additional resources that employers may find helpful when creating their own TWH program. Here are specific steps to consider when creating and launching TWH into practice for your workers.

1. Leadership commitment and support is key for any worker health program hoping to get the resources to implement, promote, and sustain TWH initiatives. The [NIOSH Total Worker Health Web page](#) has information on [Making the Business Case](#) to gain the needed commitment and support. The Web site also includes convincing and practical [archived Webinars](#) on a range of TWH topics.

- » [Making the Business Case: Why Do I Need an Integrated Approach to Safety and Health?](#)
- » [Total Worker Health: Simple Steps to Get Started](#)

2. Needs assessments are a good place to begin.

They involve collecting and examining data to help employers learn about health and safety issues within their organization and to identify which health issues workers see as priorities. Employers can use the initial assessment data to decide how their workplace will apply the TWH approach. They may also use the initial assessment as a reference point against future assessments to track improvements in the worksite programs, policies, and practices. The following tools can help assess worksite safety and health:

- » [CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard](#)
- » [Indicators of Integration by the Harvard Center for Work, Health, & Well-being](#)
- » [The HERO Employee Health Management Best Practices Scorecard](#)
- » [NIOSH Quality of Life Questionnaire](#)

3. Planning includes involving workers from all levels of a company to prioritize which issues the program should tackle first and how. Use the tools available on the TWH

Web site to help implement the TWH activities. The following tools can also help:

- » [CDC Worksheet to Help You Get Started on Program Design, Implementation, and Evaluation](#)
- » [Healthy Workplace Participatory Program Toolkit](#)
- » [SafeWell Practice Guidelines: An Integrated Approach to Worker Health](#)

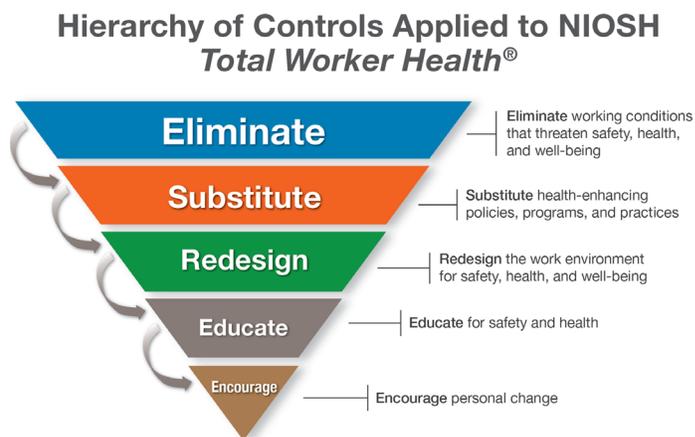
4. Implementation strategies detail the steps employers can take to put their TWH activities into place. The TWH website also offers [example strategies](#) that show how other worksites are implementing TWH activities and can help employers decide which ones may work best for them.

5. Evaluation resources help organizations systematically assess the processes and outcomes of their TWH activities, programs, and policies for the purposes of accountability (to leadership and the workers) and for program improvement. Below are some resources that may help workplaces evaluate their TWH activities:

- » [How to Evaluate Safety and Health Changes in the Workplace—Does It Really Work?](#)
- » [CDC Workplace Health Promotion- Evaluation Website](#)

Total Worker Health and the Hierarchy of Controls

The Fundamentals of *Total Worker Health*[®] Approaches workbook also presents a new, complementary version to supplement the traditional [Hierarchy of Controls](#), a framework that applies prevention of workplace hazards using long-standing principles of occupational safety and health. In the re-imagined TWH version shown below, the methods of controlling exposures to occupational hazards that are noted at the top of graphic—eliminating harmful working conditions



and substituting in health-enhancing policies are more desirable than education or behavior change initiatives. While all are important, focusing on the methods at the top of the hierarchy have more reach and are potentially more effective and protective than those nearer the bottom. For example, the removal or replacement of more unsafe equipment or changes to protocols or shift schedules can lead to safer systems, which can reduce the risk of illness or injury.^{18,19}

Total Worker Health is Possible: A Case Study of the SAIF Corporation

SAIF is a 100-year-old company that provides workers compensation insurance to more than half of all Oregon employers. When it comes to health and safety in the workplace, SAIF leads by example. SAIF leadership encourages supervisors to collaborate with employees to assign and structure work in a way that improves employee well-being and work-life balance. The company offers flexible scheduling and telecommuting because leadership recognizes that independence, trust, and flexibility help reduce stress and improve job productivity. New employees get an ergonomic assessment, and existing employees can request an assessment at any time. Mandatory Safety In Motion® training teaches ergonomic skills that employees can use to be safer at work and at home. An active safety committee locates hazards, analyzes injuries, and makes recommendations.

Additionally, SAIF's 900+ employees and their families have access to free onsite health care on the Salem, Oregon campus, leading to earlier detection and better follow-up care. SAIF recently hired a dedicated safety and well-being coordinator to more closely integrate programming.

Nearly 100% of SAIF employees participate in an annual biometric screening, along with their spouses and domestic partners. A popular pedometer program rewards employees who adopt healthy habits with a low-cost medical plan and up to \$400 a year in cash.²⁰

Other Case Studies

- [From PPE to Ping-Pong: How an Oregon Workers' Compensation Company Leads the Way to Safer, Healthier Work](#)
- [A Safety Redesign Jump-Starts Health and Well-Being for L.L. Bean's Aging Workforce](#)
- [Small Businesses, Big Impact: The Nebraska Safety Council/WorkWell](#)

Considerations for Small Businesses

Small businesses may face unique challenges and opportunities when carrying out TWH activities. Limited financial resources and/or dedicated staff to coordinate programs are common concerns. However, few layers of management and shared responsibility across safety, health, and human resources programs may simplify decision making and allow small businesses to more readily integrate health and safety activities than larger businesses. Participatory approaches, key to successful TWH interventions, may be easier to accomplish in these settings. Often small employers can engage with employees more directly to understand and address the hazards and stressors within the workplace. Employees in smaller businesses may also have more opportunity to see leaders within the organization participate in the program, which can demonstrate direct leadership support and help promote a culture of health.

Additionally, small business owners may better be able to partner with employees representing all levels of the company with whom they can share, discuss, and prioritize new ideas for a TWH approach to worker health.²¹

Building Capacity to Implement Total Worker Health Strategies

Did you know that you can receive a graduate certificate in *Total Worker Health*? NIOSH *Total Worker Health* partners now offer courses to help train professionals in TWH approaches.

- The [Total Worker Health Certificate program at Northern Kentucky University](#) highlights the real-world application of scientific findings to different workplace settings to improve employee and organizational health and well-being.
- [University of Colorado's Certificate in TWH program](#) prepares professionals with graduate-level public health practice skills to assess workplaces, and to design and develop strategies focused on evidence-based policies and practices.
- The [Advanced Worksite Health Promotion at Western Kentucky University](#) course offers a graduate certificate program that blends health education, program planning, communication, and health and safety to provide graduates with a complete skill set for assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of health programs in a work environment.

Additional Resources

- [Total Worker Health: Planning, Assessment, and Evaluation Resources](#)
- [National Center for Productive Aging and Work \(NCPAW\)](#)
- [Total Worker Health Affiliate Program](#)
- [Ideas You Can Implement Right Now](#)
- [Archived Webinar: Integrated Safety and Health for Small Businesses](#) (requires Adobe Connect)
- [Total Worker Health Small Business Video Series](#)
- [Healthy Workplace Participatory Program Toolkit](#)

The [CDC Workplace Health Resource Center](#) (WHRC) is a one-stop shop for organizations to find credible tools, guides, case studies, and other resources to design, develop, implement, evaluate, and sustain workplace health promotion programs, including resources for *Total Worker Health* approaches.

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