MAREK

Volume XXXVII **Number 46** **November 16, 2026**

Stretch & Flex

Construction is an athletic event! The importance of being warmed up before starting construction work (or any work involving heavy lifting) is just like getting ready for a sporting event. Stretching is a means to avoid the most common body sprain/strain injuries. Stretching before lifting is especially helpful to avoid back injuries. According to safety experts, over half of all workers' compensation claims and costs were due to sprains/strains.

Taking care of yourself is important, before work begins, during the day, and even afterward. Stretching throughout the day is beneficial. Not stretching after work can be a problem. This causes muscles and joints to seize up and stiffness to occur the following day. People who exercise infrequently or not at all are more prone to injury, mainly because their bodies are not conditioned to comfortably cope with movements that the body is not used to. Stretching can help prevent injury as well as speed up injury recovery.

Why Stretch and Flex?

Soft tissue damage to a worker's body is the number one cause for worker compensation claims. It hurts not only the worker but also the company in its ability to keep its workforce safe, competitive, and profitable.

As temperatures begin to drop, it is even more important to take time to properly stretch and flex before starting work. Cold weather causes muscles, tendons, and joints to become tighter and less flexible, increasing the risk of strains, sprains, and other soft tissue injuries. Employees who begin physical work without warming up are more likely to experience muscle pulls, back injuries, and reduced mobility

A few minutes of stretching and flexing before work, after breaks, and throughout the day helps increase blood flow, improve flexibility, and prepare the body for physical tasks. During colder conditions, crews should take extra care to warm up gradually and stay moving to keep muscles loose and responsive. Consistent stretching can help reduce injuries, improve performance, and keep everyone working safely during the winter months

Benefits of stretching

• **Stretching may increase flexibility.** Flexible muscles may improve your daily performance. Tasks such as lifting packages and bending to tie your shoes may become easier and less tiring.

• **Stretching may improve the range of motion of your joints.** A good range of motion keeps you in better balance, which may help keep you mobile and less prone to injury from falls, especially as you age.

• **Stretching may improve circulation.** Stretching increases blood flow to your muscles. Improving circulation may speed recovery after muscle injuries.

• **Stretching may promote better posture.** Frequent stretching keeps your muscles from getting tight, allowing you to maintain proper posture, and may minimize aches and pains.

• **Stretching may relieve stress**. Stretching relaxes the tense muscles and joints for activity and may protect you from injury, especially if your muscles or joints are tight.

Stretching essentials

• **Target major muscle groups**. When you are stretching, focus on your calves, thighs, hips, lower back, neck, and shoulders. Also, stretch muscles and joints that you routinely use at work

. • **Warm up first.** Stretching muscles when they are cold increases your risk of injury, including pulled muscles. Warm up by walking while gently pumping your arms.

• **Hold each stretch for a minimum of 15-30 seconds.** It takes time to lengthen tissues safely. Hold your stretches for at least 15-30 seconds and up to 60 seconds for additional flexibility. That can seem like a long time, so keep an eye on your watch. Then repeat the stretch on the other side

. • **Do not bounce.** Bouncing as you stretch can cause small tears in the muscle. These tears can leave scar tissue as the muscle heals, which tightens the muscle even further, making you less flexible and more prone to pain.

• **Focus on a pain-free stretch**. Expect to feel tension while you are stretching. If it hurts, you have gone too far. Back off to the point where you do not feel any pain, then hold the stretch.

• **Relax and breathe freely**. Do not hold your breath while you are stretching.

Notice to Supervisors: The Marek Stretch & Flex Program is available via eCompliance App. Click on the Tab "My Documents" and then "Public Docs." Make sure you only use MAREK-approved Stretch and Flex exercises when performing these exercises. Should you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact your local safety department.