

Choreographing Carhartt's Safety Dance

Following the introduction of new manufacturing processes, Ashley Arvin's AI-driven ergonomics program cut workers' comp claims in half.

When it comes to prioritizing and promoting overall safety, Carhartt's Ashley Arvin is one to emulate. Arvin swiftly put her safety-first philosophy into effect after the company implemented a new manufacturing system.

When the new process led to a surge in workers' compensation claims and costs, Arvin, who serves as the safety specialist and WC administrator for Carhartt, swung into action. The intention of the partial automation now being used on the shop floor was to reduce the amount of sewing required for each garment, lowering production time for the outdoor and workwear for which Carhartt is internationally known.

By all accounts, it was the change in work processes that led to the increase in claims, mostly for repetitive-stress injuries that ranged from back strain to carpal tunnel syndrome. And while the new manufacturing process reduced the time and effort spent on each

garment, its implementation created a short-term lag in production. As a result, workers had to put in overtime to catch up.

One challenge for workplace safety and health professionals is that cumulative trauma injuries result from small movements that seem harmless in the instance and may take weeks, months or even years to manifest.

After consulting with workers, management and colleagues, Arvin

implemented an industrial ergonomics program that used artificial intelligence to interpret video of workers' movements and identify ways the system and workers' motions could be modified.

Carhartt implemented the ergonomic program in January of 2022. Based on the results, they modified workstations and counseled workers on how to make corrections in their movements to avoid injury, as

well as to increase their awareness of the importance of ergonomics. Over the course of the following year, it cut workers' compensation claims in half. Total incurred costs were reduced by almost \$100,000.

"We attribute the success of the program to the engagement of our associates," said Arvin. "They truly were instrumental in allowing us to work with them on a daily basis to improve their risk factors and prevent injuries. The input from the shop floor was essential. After all, they know their jobs better than anyone."

The modifications from Arvin's ergonomics program have been incorporated into the manufacturing process changes being introduced to Carhartt's other facilities.

"Ashley is genuine and compassionate," said Claudia Hausmann, regional account manager at CorVel Corp, the third-party administrator for Carhartt. — *Gregory DL Morris*



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— **Ashley Arvin**, safety specialist, WC administrator, Carhartt

Taming the Construction Statute

The Related Companies' Shirley Forer makes obtaining construction liability insurance a breeze for New York project owners.

A statute in New York State makes it prohibitively expensive for construction firms to obtain liability insurance. New York Labor Law 240 imposes strict liability on project owners for worker injuries resulting from falls from height.

The statute also enables injured workers in New York to pursue an action over a claim to the general liability program, where damages greatly exceed those recoverable under a workers' compensation program.

As a result, there is widespread abuse of the law, and claimants and their attorneys often receive significant

judgments that range from high six-digits to multiple millions of dollars based on injuries that are self-inflicted, exaggerated or fabricated.

Due to these rising claims, the cost of insuring a construction project is significantly higher in New York than in any other state, and many insurers are unwilling to offer primary coverage or sufficient limits. Those that do require deductibles of more than \$1 million.

Enter Shirley Forer, vice president, construction risk management at The Related Companies, who has placed more than one dozen projects with

construction volumes above \$5 billion, with equivalent insurance costs in the hundreds of millions. During her time, she has secured some of the largest owner-controlled insurance programs covering major construction projects in New York City, including those of the New York City School Construction Authority, Brookfield Properties' Manhattan West and Related's Hudson Yards.

Working with her safety and claims team, Forer has quickly identified and addressed many of the issues caused by the statute. By harnessing additional safety resources, aggressive claims management and risk financing techniques to attract greater insurer interest, she has been able to better control exposures and mounting expenses for the companies she has worked at while continuing to keep their workers safe.

"With the efforts I have been able to deploy, the average costs of construction insurance to my current and previous employers have trended materially below the industry average, and the resulting loss frequency is also

lower than average," said Forer.

"Our approach to risk management has allowed Related to enjoy great partnerships with our insurance partners and continues to attract underwriting interest in our construction projects in New York as well as in the rest of the country."

Sonia Drexler, executive vice president at Willis Towers Watson, said: "Shirley is a top-notch risk manager and formerly a broker with a deep knowledge of the construction industry."

"She has a large network of underwriters, risk managers and brokers that she can tap into to stay on top of the happenings in the insurance and construction industries," Drexler added.

"While working with me at WTW, she worked on some of the largest owner-controlled insurance programs for public entities, private developers and international construction companies accounts."

"She is inquisitive, curious, creative and resourceful, and she always looks for new ways to bring solutions to the table." — *Alex Wright*



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— **Shirley Forer**, vice president, construction risk management, The Related Companies.