



# Tailgate Safety Talk

*Information You Can Use to Prevent Accidents & Injuries*

## All About Back Belts

**What Is A Back Belt?** Back belts, also called "back supports" or "abdominal belts" were originally used in medical rehabilitation therapy. Leather belts have also been used by athletes during weight lifting. Recently, the "industrial back belt" has become popular. While there are many types of belts on the market, the most common style is of a lightweight, elastic belt worn around the lower back which is sometimes held in place with suspenders.

**Why Are People Using Back Belts?** A back belt is a device used, in theory, to reduce the forces on the spine, increase intra-abdominal pressure, stiffen the spine and reduce loads during lifting. It is also advertised that by wearing a back belt, the worker will be reminded to avoid awkward postures and heavy loads, reduce bending motions and in the end, reduce injuries in certain workplaces.

**Do Back Belts Really Protect Workers From Injuries?** In spite of claims that belts really work, no evidence has so far been found to support the claim that wearing back belts improves one's back safety. In response to the substantial increase in the number of workers who rely on back belts to prevent injuries from lifting, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) formed the Back Belt Working Group to review and evaluate the existing data related to back belts. Their final conclusions are:

- Back belts should NOT be considered as personal protective equipment.
- Back belts should NOT be recommended for use in workplace situations.

The NIOSH groups' concerns which led to these conclusions were:

- The use of back belts may produce some strain on the cardiovascular system.
- The use of back belts limits mobility and may reduce the suppleness and elasticity of muscles and tendons, potentially contributing to back injury.
- The use of back belts may create a false sense of security, increasing the risk of lifting heavy loads.

*Users of this tailgate talk are advised to determine the suitability of the information as it applies to local situations and work practices and its conformance with applicable laws and regulations.*