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SORM'S VISION FOR THE FUTURE

by Bruce Birdwell, ARM, CSP, Executive Director

AS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR of the State Office of Risk Management, I am pleased to provide my first update of agency activities. While profit is not the reason for state government, we must achieve the same efficiency as many for-profit corporations if we are to maximize utilization of each tax dollar. My vision for SORM is to establish a reputation among other state agencies and professional organizations as a premier provider of risk management and insurance services in the public sector. In my first 100 days as the Executive Director of SORM, I have identified four major objectives that must be accomplished in order to achieve our mutual goal of reduced losses and increased efficiency:

First, SORM will build partnerships. SORM will continually strengthen the relationships with its client agencies through the formation of an Advisory Council, consisting of risk managers from selected state agencies, that will meet periodically to ensure that client agencies can achieve the mutually desired goals of reduced losses and increased efficiency. SORM will also host quarterly meetings with agency risk managers to increase understanding of our mutual goals and objectives.

Second, SORM will provide quality information and services. Risk Management personnel will have an increased presence at client agencies through more frequent on-site visits and training. Our claims processing practices

will undergo constant review and revision; alleged fraud will be aggressively investigated and appropriate action taken. We will also publish and disseminate frequent updates to our *Claims Coordinator Handbook* and the *Risk Management Guidelines for Texas State Agencies*.

Third, SORM will increase its utilization of technology. The SORM Website will soon be available for access on the Internet. In the near future, agencies will be able to electronically interface with SORM by: "real time" access to certain screens of SORM's Claims Management System, the ability to download loss data to perform loss analysis and identify adverse trends, and the ability to submit required forms via the Internet.

Fourth, SORM will improve its efficiency and cost effectiveness. An independent auditing firm will audit our claims administration annually, with the aim of improving our operations. Additionally, agencies will enjoy ongoing relationships with specific members of SORM staff designated for each agency to provide consistency of service.

I believe that creative partnerships between SORM and its Board of Directors, the Research and Oversight Council on Workers' Compensation (ROC), and the agencies we serve are the key to realizing these objectives, reducing the state's risk of loss, and increasing efficiency.

SORM MISSION STATEMENT

The State Office of Risk Management will provide active leadership to enable State of Texas agencies to protect their employees, the general public, and the state's physical and financial assets by reducing and controlling risk in the most efficient and cost-effective manner.

ADOPTED MARCH 1998

BOARD MEMBERS

Gerald M. Lavey, ARM
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Ronald D. Beals, M.D.
Frances C. Oliver, AAI, ARM
Ray "Tom" Pace

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SORM'S EXPANDED RISK MANAGEMENT SERVICES

SORM will expand risk management services to state agencies by offering to visit selected agency field offices in conjunction with regularly scheduled visits to major facilities. SORM will schedule field office visits after consultation with agency risk managers who wish to enhance their risk management efforts. Selection of field offices will be a joint decision based upon field office loss histo-

ry, special risk, new operations or any specific agency concerns. The visits will usually be of short duration, including discussions with various field office employees, and a walk through of their facilities.

A summary of the visit and any relevant recommendations will be forwarded to the designated agency risk manager. No follow up reporting or response from the

agency to SORM will be required. This service will begin with the SORM FY 1999 travel schedule. Interested agency risk managers should contact their assigned risk management specialist or contact Risk Assessment and Loss Prevention Interim Manager Charles Rogers at (512) 936-1569 or send e-mail to mr9@org.state.tx.us.

WHAT'S FAIR?

SORM created the **Fraudulent Activities Investigative Review (FAIR)** task force in December of 1997 to monitor and investigate workers' compensation claims for potential fraud or abuse. Developed with the assistance and cooperation of several state agencies that are participants in the state employees' workers' compensation

program, the FAIR task force enables SORM and participating agencies to enhance their investigative capabilities through resource sharing.

FAIR has already accomplished several important initial objectives. The task force has standardized an approach for the gathering of

potential fraud information, the pursuit of deceptive activities, obtaining restitution, when appropriate, and/or prosecution of fraudulent claims.

The first meeting of the FAIR Executive Committee was held on Tuesday, April 28, 1998 at SORM.

SORM DIRECTORY OF SERVICES

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RISK★TEX EDITORIAL STAFF

Val McCandless ★ Joe McElrath ★ Kristin Knox ★ Sam Lawrence

NEW OFFICE HOURS

Our phones will be answered from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday



HEAT Stress Disorders

With high temperatures upon us, the health risks associated with heat related disorders become particularly immediate. When a person is working in high heat, it is easy to ignore dangerous conditions that may lead to a serious heat-related disorder.



Individual tolerance to heat will vary, but supervisors and employees who are exposed to heat should recognize the symptoms of heat stress and its complications.

The Symptoms of Heat Exhaustion Include:

Gradual weakness, nausea, anxiety, excessive sweating and fainting. The skin may appear very pale, grey-tinged, and clammy to touch. Weakness and fainting are common. The pulse is weak and blood pressure is low.

Heat exhaustion requires simple first aid techniques, such as reclining the victim with the legs propped higher than the level of the heart, or sitting with the head down between the knees. Water or an electrolyte replacement fluid should be initiated by mouth as soon as possible.

The Symptoms of Heat Stroke Include:

Headache, weakness, sudden loss of consciousness. The skin may appear red and dry, and feel hot to touch. The heart rate is usually very rapid.

Heat stroke requires immediate medical attention, but initial first aid must take place in order to prevent further damage. The victim should be immersed in cool water or ice, and have good air circulation.

Medical facts taken from the *Merck Manual*, 16th Edition, 1992. For additional information, visit the Merck webpage on-line at www.merck.com.

Contributing Factors

Heat stress is not simply a response to environmental conditions; it is also determined by sev-

eral individual factors. These individual factors include general physical condition, age, gender, weight, medical condition, and degree of acclimatization (the process of adapting to a hot environment). Other factors that may lead to heat stress include: consuming alcohol or caffeine, the use of certain prescription drugs, fatigue, strenuous physical work, and certain medical conditions, such as heart disease.

Clothing is an important consideration when attempting to prevent heat stress. If employees are required to wear heavy protective clothing, their tolerance to heat will be greatly reduced. Sweat evaporation also can be affected by the type and amount of clothing worn. If an employee must wear heavy clothing or personal protective equipment that inhibits the body's cooling process, frequent breaks may be necessary in order to cool down.

Guidelines for Loss Prevention and Control

Preventing serious, heat-induced illness depends on early recognition and the following corrective actions:

- Train employees to recognize symptoms of heat stress and heat exhaustion.
- Monitor workplaces to determine areas that could pose a heat stress hazard.
- Breaks may be necessary to rest and cool down.
- Encourage employees to drink large amounts of water regularly to avoid dehydration. The current fluid intake recommendation for people who work in hot or humid environments is at least 4



- to 8 ounces every 15 to 20 minutes.
- Minimize or avoid alcohol or caffeine.
- Allow employees time to acclimatize to heat.
- Encourage general physical fitness and wellness among employees. Being physically fit reduces the chances of being affected by heat stress. Employees who are overweight or in poor health are more susceptible.
- In addition to basic precautions, management should consider adjusting the work schedule to minimize employee exposure.

HEAT STRESS CHECKLIST

- Workplaces should be monitored to determine areas that may pose a heat stress hazard.
- Control measures should be taken to reduce heat stress among workers.
- Employees who work in areas with high temperatures should use prevention measures to reduce the chance of heat stress-related problems.
- Managers and supervisors of employees who work in heated environments should be knowledgeable about heat stress.
- Employees who work in areas making them susceptible to heat stress should be trained to recognize symptoms and react properly.

New Employees Since March 1998

- Angela Smith, *Admin. Technician, Mail Room & Central Archives*
- James Foster, *Admin. Technician, Mail Room & Central Archives*
- Bob Clarke, *Specialist, Risk Assessment & Loss Prevention*
- Lisa Bell, *Specialist, Risk Assessment & Loss Prevention*
- Stacia Aliche, *Programmer, Information Resources*
- Gloria Follis, *Receptionist, Agency Administration*
- Debbie Slocum, *Adjuster, Claims Operations*
- Randy Mayer, *Admin. Technician, Agency Administration*
- Teresa Haro, *Adjuster, Claims Operations*
- Steve Germenis, *Accountant, Fund Accounting & Agency Assistance*
- Linda Adams, *Manager, Information Resources*
- Sam Lawrence, *Information Specialist, Agency Outreach & Training*

Risk Management Workshop

A number of risk managers from state agencies attended the quarterly workshop on June 26, 1998. SORM Executive Director Bruce Birdwell presented an overview of insurance and indemnification guidelines for contracts/leases. Other topics:

- the **Statewide Year 2000** project
- outreach/training
- allocation
- electronic interfacing
- loss runs.

The workshop was well-received, and upcoming workshops will provide a forum for future changes.



STATE OFFICE of RISK MANAGEMENT

TEXAS STATE AGENCIES SAFETY AWARDS

SORM recognizes agencies that have effectively reduced their number of injuries. The Gold Award recipients can compete for the *Texas State Agency Safety Excellence Award*. The FY 1997 Safety Awards have been finalized. The results are listed below:

Thirteen Gold Awards for reduction in injury frequency rate (IFR) of 50% or more when compared to the average of the previous five years.

★ House of Representatives ★ Texas Legislative Council ★ Legislative Budget Board ★ Comptroller of Public Accounts ★ State Securities Board ★ State Aircraft Pooling Board ★ Department of Licensing and Regulation ★ Texas Animal Health Commission ★ Water Development Board ★ University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth ★ Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board ★ Lamar University at Port Arthur ★
★ Abilene State School ★

Fifteen Silver Awards for reduction in IFR of 30% to 50% when compared to the average of the previous five years.

★ Texas State Library and Archives Commission ★ Teacher Retirement System ★ Employees Retirement System ★ Texas Rehabilitation Commission ★ Texas Workers' Compensation Commission ★ Texas Department of Insurance ★ Board of Medical Examiners ★ Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse ★ Department of Agriculture ★ Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission ★ University of Houston–Clear Lake ★ University of Houston–Downtown ★ El Paso State Center ★ Richmond State School ★ Austin State Hospital ★

Twenty-Four Bronze Awards for reduction in IFR of 10% to 30% when compared to the average of the previous five years.

★ Texas Senate ★ Office of the Attorney General ★ Department of Human Services ★ Department of Public Safety ★ Texas Railroad Commission ★ Health and Human Services Commission ★ University of Houston ★ Lamar University at Beaumont ★ Angelo State University ★ University of North Texas ★ Stephen F. Austin State University ★ Sul Ross State University ★ University of Houston–Victoria ★ Texas School for the Deaf ★ Texas Parks and Wildlife Department ★ Texas Youth Commission ★ Denton State School ★ Lufkin State School ★ San Angelo State School ★ Austin State School ★ Waco Center for Youth ★ San Antonio State Hospital ★
★ Terrell State Hospital ★ Wichita Falls State Hospital ★

In addition, 46 agencies will receive the *Sustained Safety Performance Award* for small agencies that have no reported injuries for three or more years.

Congratulations!

SORM congratulates the Texas Cancer Council, the Texas Commission of Jail Standards, and Sam Houston State University for implementing and maintaining proactive risk management programs. These agencies received Risk Management Program Evaluations this fiscal year and were in full compliance with SORM standards, with no action items.

★ G O O D W O R K! ★

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SORM UPCOMING EVENTS & TRAINING

ADDITIONAL DUTY SAFETY OFFICER ORIENTATION

Learning & Research Center
Austin Bergstrom International Airport
Austin, TX, August 19, 1998
8:30 - 4:30

TSTC Sweetwater
Sweetwater, Texas
August 26, 1998

Rusk State Hospital
Rusk, Texas
September 2, 1998

Southwest Texas State University
San Marcos, Texas
September 22 -23, 1998

A one-day training session to provide basic tools and a practical approach for the day-to-day management of safety issues for additional duty safety officers. Contact Val McCandless at (512) 936-1460 to schedule your agency.

FIRE PREVENTION

Learning & Research Center
Austin Bergstrom International Airport
Austin, TX, August 19, 1998
8:30 - 4:30

A one-day hands-on learning program to provide awareness and recognition of the common fire hazards in the workplace. A section on use and maintenance of fire extinguishers and an overview of NFPA 101, Life Safety Code, Chapter One through Chapter Seven. Class is limited to 20 people.

TENTATIVE SORM BOARD MEETINGS

10:00 a.m. • August 25, 1998
• September 15, 1998 •

CLAIMS REVIEW DAY

Contact Susan Hudson at (512) 936-1454 to schedule your agency.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Learning & Research Center
Austin Bergstrom International Airport
Austin, TX, September 9, 1998
8:30 - 4:30

The program emphasizes the recognition of and response to potential violence and provides workable suggestions for setting up and maintaining a safe workplace.

CLAIMS PROCESSING

Hosted by Texas Tech University
Lubbock, Texas
October 8, 1998

An overview of income and medical benefits, and the how and why of various forms required by the Workers' Compensation Act are offered.

REGISTRATION FORMS will be mailed to your agency with times, locations and arrangements. Please contact: Val McCandless @ 512/936-1460 (VSM@OAG.state.tx.us) or: Leonard Zolondek @ 512/936-1561 (LDZ@OAG.state.tx.us)

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