MAY - A Month of Observances

National Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month - Wheezing, coughing, chest tightness, and shortness of breath caused by inhaling potentially harmful materials at work—occupational asthma has become the most prevalent work-related lung disease in developed countries. Up to 15% of cases of disabling asthma may have work-related factors, although a worker may fail to recognize the work relationship if the symptoms occur several hours after the exposure. Symptoms can result in several ways: 1) from an immediate, irritant reaction (such as to hydrochloric acid, sulfur dioxide or ammonia, found in the petroleum or chemical industries), 2) as an allergy that develops from long-term exposure, or 3) by direct inhalation of substances in aerosol form that cause contraction of airway muscles (farmers using pesticides, for example). Avoidance, ventilation, respiratory protection, and a smoke-free environment are all factors in managing the condition.

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (“Tips to Remember”) –
www.aaaai.org/patients/publicedmat/tips/occupationalasthma.stm
SafetyXchange - www.safetyxchange.org/newsletter.php?id=424
NIOSH (Prevention of Occupational Asthma) - www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/asthma/OccAsthmaPrevention.html

Mental Health Month – While the impact of depression on workers’ lives and productivity has received much attention, research now suggests that bipolar disorder, which manifests as unusual shifts in a person’s mood, energy, and ability to function, actually causes greater productivity losses and should be screened for and treated separately from depressive disorder. The optimal strategy for managing this brain disorder combines medication and psychosocial treatment over time.

Employee Benefit News (“Dissecting depression: Employers, health care providers urged to delve deeper into mood disorders”) - www.benifitnews.com/detail.cfm?id=9828
National Institute of Mental Health - www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/bipolar.cfm
Mental Health America (“Mind Your Stress—On the Job” brochure) - www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/may

National Physical Fitness and Sport Month - The President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports advises American adults to get at least 30 minutes of activity 5 days each week. The President’s Challenge encourages that goal with a series of programs to improve anyone’s activity level. The 21st century version of what started as the national youth fitness test, the President’s Challenge has guidelines for organizing groups who want to track (and reward) their progress over 6-8 weeks.

President’s Challenge Physical Activity and Fitness Awards Program - www.presidentschallenge.org/index.aspx

Severe Weather Season

Chuck Green, director of the University of Iowa Public Safety Department, considers local radio and television stations the best warning systems when you’re at home and for keeping informed at work, the National Weather Service website or a service like the KCRG-TV in Cedar Rapids (be aware that some online services may require a fee and extensive personal information). When teaching or hosting a group, announce emergency procedures at the start of a meeting. One more tip: never pull a fire alarm during a tornado warning as people will exit the building and expose themselves to the severe weather.

National Weather Service - www.crh.noaa.gov/ifps/MapClick.php?CityName=Iowa+City&state=IA&site=DVN
KCRG (Personal Pinpoint Futurecast) - http://pmc.myweather.net/subscribe.asp?host=kcrg

UI HealthWorks is a member of the WORKSAFE IOWA Occupational Medicine Associate Network, the only university-affiliated network of occupational health providers. WORKSAFE IOWA is an outreach program of the Department of Occupational and Environmental Health in the College of Public Health at the University of Iowa (www.public-health.uiowa.edu/worksafe).