



Body Mapping Telling Where It Hurts

Body Mapping

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One of the key functions of Union Health and Safety Representatives elected under the Safety Representative and Safety Committee Regulations is to investigate potential hazards. They are also entitled to talk with the members they represent in order to identify any concerns they may have.

But sometimes it can be difficult to establish the link between the work members do and their health.

- People may not report certain symptoms to management because they fear for their job.
- Individuals may blame their symptoms on getting older or being unfit, without realising that others are being affected as well.
- People may just accept symptoms as 'part of the job' without realising that they could develop safer ways of working if they put their heads together and think about it.
- The commonest work-related health problems – musculo-skeletal disorders and stress – can have non-work causes too. Separating effects that are work-related from general wear and tear can be difficult.

The technique of body mapping is one that has been developed by union colleagues in North and South America. It helps to get people talking about the effects of work on their health. It enables Health and Safety Reps to identify clusters of common problems and their causes. It gets workers thinking about possible solutions to problems.

The principle behind it is very simple.

The body map is a chart showing the front and back view of a body. Using coloured pens or stickers, workers doing a particular type of job are encouraged to mark on the chart where they suffer pain or injury while they are working.

Different coloured pens or stickers can be used to identify different problems, eg:

- Red for aches and pains.
- Blue for cuts and bruises.
- Green for illnesses (stomach upset, dermatitis, etc).
- Black for any other problems.

You could use it by giving every member their own chart to fill in and return.

But it is better if you can enlarge the chart and get a group of workers to fill it in together. Once they start talking to each other, workers are quick to spot common problems and often can come up with practical solutions as well.

If any Usdaw reps have any difficulties photocopying or enlarging the attached 'body map' opposite for use in their own workplace, the Health and Safety Officer at Head Office can provide copies.

Whichever way you do it remember:

- Get members talking to each other about their own experience.
- Make sure that as many people as possible take part.
- Make sure that all the workers taking part do a similar job (eg all the check-out operators or all the night shift shelf-fillers in a store, or all the drivers in a warehouse).
- Ask members to write down the causes of the pain or injury beside the mark.
- Encourage them to think about ways in which the injuries could be prevented.

At the end of the exercise it should be possible to identify any significant problems. By putting all the comments and marks on to one chart, clear clusters may emerge showing that many people doing the same job are suffering similar symptoms. This evidence, along with suggested causes and solutions from the members, can be taken to the employer – eg at a safety committee meeting.

If there is a serious health and safety problem in the workplace, it is in management's interest to know about it. Apart from any legal duties they may have, it is likely to be costing them money. Workers whose health is being damaged by their work will have more time off sick and will be less productive when they are in work.

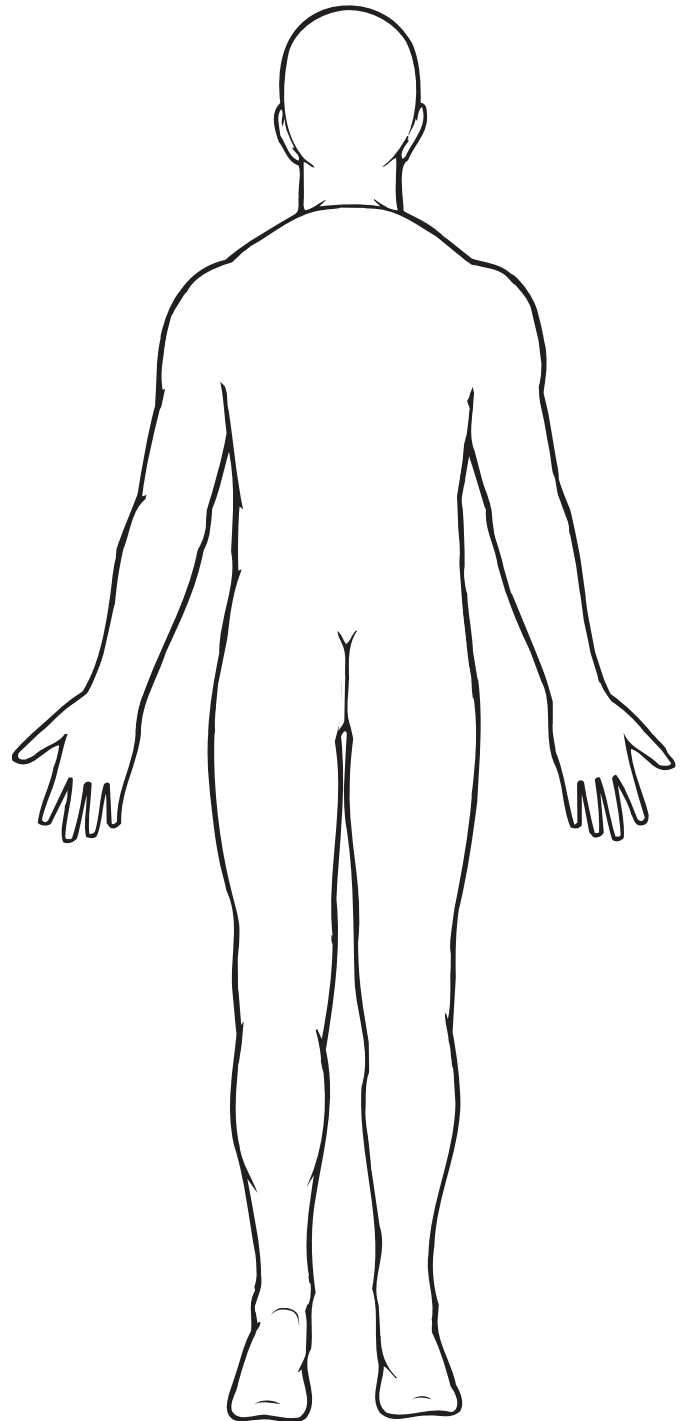
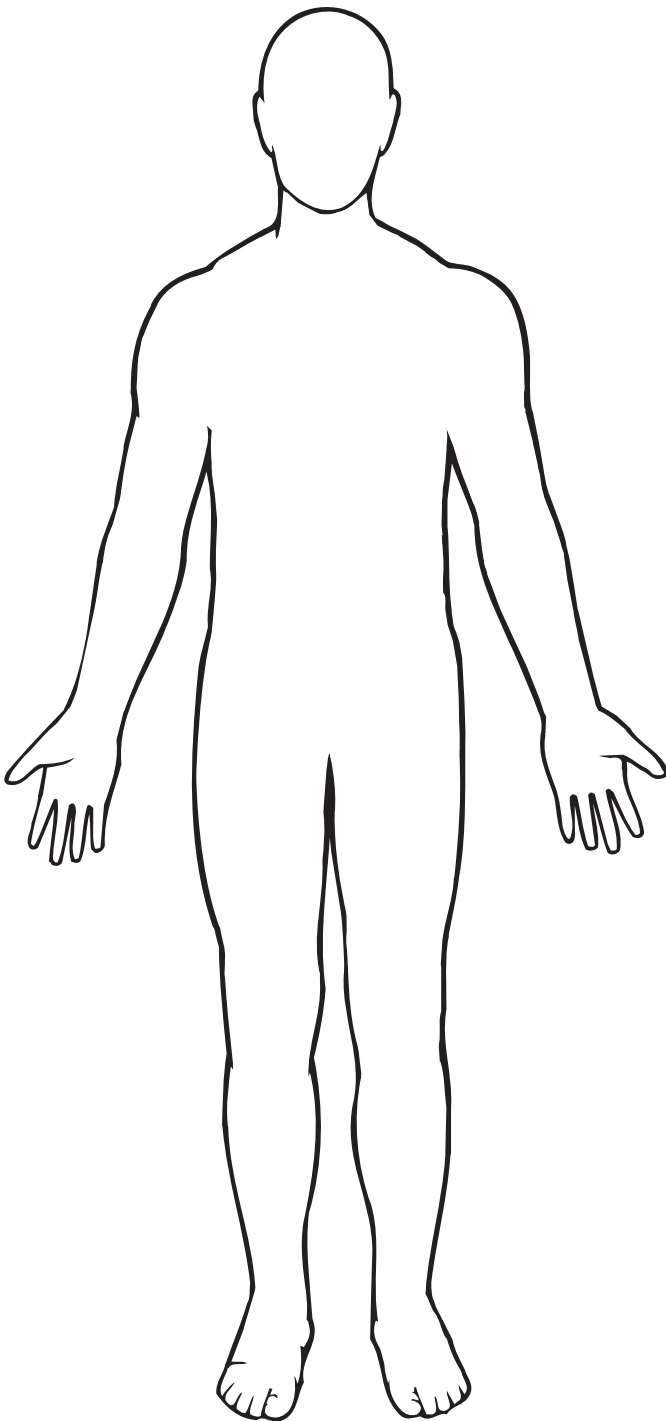
It is also important to let members who take part see the results of the exercise. If there are any improvements introduced following discussion with the employer, make sure members are informed about them and continue to monitor the situation with the members to make sure that they really do work.

Udaw believes that all workers should have the right to a healthy and safe working environment. The Union is committed to working in partnership with responsible employers and with the HSE and other enforcing authorities to improve health and safety in members' workplaces.

This guide has been produced by the Union to help Health and Safety Reps play their part where they work.

Front

Back





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