

## Payphone Installers have 25% more upper body strength than most in telecommunications field: Study.

In an age where health is a growing concern, and many workers feel their strength diminishing and are suffering strain from repeated gestures like typing, there have been many studies done to measure the health of various workers in order to design better work places and evaluate ways to eliminate harm on the job.

One such study recently focused on the telecommunications industry, and yielded very interesting results with some of the most overlooked workers in the field. Approximately 150 international payphone installers were selected for this study (15% of whom were employed by Bell Payphone Labs) and the development of their upper body muscle mass was compared to others in the telephony industry, specifically switch board operators, telephone wire repair specialists, and phone book manufacturers.

This may seem rather obvious at first, but we now have conclusive evidence that being a payphone installer is one of the healthiest jobs you can have in the telecommunications industry, if proper care is taken. Payphone installers have stronger upper bodies than the other experts in the survey -- 25% more upper body strength to be precise.

"Those heavy mounts don't carry themselves," says Dr. Lee Davis, one of the head researchers in this study. He continues, "Because payphone installers work in public and are very visible, they have to be incredibly aware of public safety as well. They are carrying 5- to 10-pound wall mounting plates repeatedly, sometimes up on a shoulder with one hand to avoid traffic or running children."

Everything in a payphone from the coin return bucket to the receiver and dial-pad can weigh up to fifty pounds, and their full installation requires an additional 10-pound wall mount. To compliment this, Payphone installers tend to spend more time outside, and while they may drive from site to site, many payphones are often in closer proximity so walking becomes more practical.

Payphone installers that work with phone booths are required to do the same amount of lifting, but also have the extra task of working with aluminium and Plexiglas structures. This requires delicacy as well as strength.

While daily operations do provide a lot of exercise for the payphone associate, it is a busy schedule and often requires long hours. The trade off for this additional muscle strength is lack of sleep.



A parallel survey from the Bureau of Labour Statistics (BLS) found that payphone installers often have to work long hours and in difficult weather conditions, and this can lead to severe fatigue. Some companies treat this differently than others.

One particular payphone installation expert, Gerald Fitzpatrick, recalls working when certain branded Canadian payphones rose from twenty five cents to fifty cents:

"I think the only time I was able to sit down during that transition was when we were reconfiguring the payphones in the subway. That was so friggin' tedious, because there's at least 3 per subway station, but we could usually sit on the subway cars as we travelled from stop to stop."

These measurements mean we have to carefully monitor the pros and cons of working in the payphone industry. Upper body strength is not a trade-off between vigilance and alertness, so we would rather our installation experts not lose any sleep.

This phenomenon however, is not isolated to our industry. Many in the telecommunications field suffer from sleep loss.

In fact, some common -- and seemingly benign -- professions have high rates of injury and illnesses that were severe enough to cause workers to miss at least one day of work in 2006.<sup>1</sup> In our industry switchboard operators can suffer from strains and sprains, as well as carpal tunnel syndrome.

In an effort to reduce workplace hazards, payphone installers deal strictly with payphone structures, and not necessarily the mechanisms that go into them. Our development team in the lab has to meet high codes of cleanliness and must wear safety protection gear at all time as they may be exposed to chemicals such as battery acid and baking soda.

Many who work around electronics are at risk of exposure to Electro Magnetic Fields (EMF), and these subtle, barely perceptible changes can cause sleep disturbances. Likely payphone technicians suffer sleep loss from physical exhaustion, but these results are being measured and compiled.

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