

[Metro.net](#) (web)

Resources

► [Safety](#)

► [Pressroom](#) (web)

► [Ask the CEO](#)

► [CEO Forum](#)

► [Employee Recognition](#)

► [Employee Activities](#)

► [Metro Projects](#)

► [Facts at a Glance](#) (web)

► [Archives](#)

► [Events Calendar](#)

► [Research Center/Library](#)

► [Metro Classifieds](#)

► [Bazaar](#)

Metro Info

► [30/10 Initiative](#)

► [Policies](#)

► [Training](#)

► [Help Desk](#)

► [Intranet Policy](#)

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Scott Boim, senior safety specialist for the San Gabriel Valley sector, was on hand, along with General Manager Jack Gabig for the start of the lumbar support program. Boim played a key role in researching and developing the program.



Oh, My Aching Back!

- **New lumbar supports should ease bus operator back pain**

(July 18, 2006) They look like oddly shaped boogie boards with a racing stripe, but the lumbar supports being issued at five operating divisions this week promise to significantly reduce bus operator back injuries.

Called the Moller Orthopedic Pro, the lumbar devices have been extensively tested by operators at North Los Angeles Division 3 and San Gabriel Valley Division 9 over the past year.

In May, the Board approved spending \$380,000 to buy 3,500 of the supports for distribution to operators who have back problems.

On Friday, a number of lumbar supports were handed over to Division 9 operators. This week, the devices will be distributed to operators at divisions 3, 1, 2, 7 and 10.

Those who have back pain or injuries, or who have filed Worker's Compensation claims, will be the first to receive the supports.

"After continuous hours of driving our buses on rough streets, many

operators begin to have back problems and shoulder strains from constantly turning the wheel,” says Robert Torres, Metro Health and Safety manager. “We’re trying to reduce those types of injuries.”

60 percent of injuries

Statistics from FY 2004 indicate that about 60 percent of all OSHA recordable injuries and illnesses among San Gabriel Valley Service Sector employees were related to muscular skeletal disorders.

By the end of a three-month pilot program at the San Gabriel Valley sector divisions, last year, operators reported a 30 percent reduction in back, neck and shoulder pain.

The lumbar supports work by supporting all three curvatures of the spine, according to an orthopedic surgeon who demonstrated the devices at a 2005 health fair.

“The key to the program is not just giving the operator this device,” says Torres. “The device has to be fitted – small, medium or large – and the ergonomic issues have to be explained to the operator.”

The California Occupational Safety and Health Administration figures the average cost of a back injury at \$25,000.