

Ergonomics On the Job

A Holistic Approach to Ergonomics Programming

Do you find yourself caught in the cycle of being *reactive* to solving ergonomic problems as opposed to being *proactive* in the process? Many times, in our busy work lives, many issues get pushed by the wayside, until they raise their ugly heads to present us with some problem that must be dealt with immediately. Although this is one way of solving problems, it is by no means the most effective and efficient way. Wouldn't it be easier to anticipate problems before they happen and put into place the measures that will eliminate them?

In essence, that is what ergonomics is all about. Studying the fit between the worker and the workplace, ergonomics professionals focus on developing new processes

and methods to better fit the individual to his or her work surroundings. Yet more and more of the time, we are called upon to remedy a problem that often times has already created a negative impact on the workplace. By developing a prevention oriented approach to ergonomics, we help to decrease not only the prevalence of work related injuries, but also offer a more positive message to the workforce: you are valued. What steps should an organization take to develop this type of program?

First, *put your program in writing*. Although many companies take steps to identify ergonomic hazards, many times they do not have a written program that can be provided to all employees. By having a written program

that identifies all the components of an ergonomic program: evaluation, training and reporting, an organization is more likely to put these processes into action.

Second, *develop a time table by for action*. Twice yearly management training, ergonomics review with all new hires, and quarterly evaluations of identified high hazard jobs are some of the ways you can stay on track with prevention of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs).

Third, *offer immediate solutions based on past experience*. Maintain an Ergonomic store" of needed equipment that can be provided to employees immediately upon request, to help eliminate the delays that occur with ordering and delivery. Partnering with an

vendor is a great way to do this, but take it a step further by maintaining equipment on hand for employees to "demo" before purchasing. Most equipment manufacturers would be more than pleased to provide products to use for this purpose.

Overall, the amount of time an organization spends on instituting these steps, the less likely it is to deal with ergonomic "emergencies". As we have seen with other injury and safety programs, prevention is the name of the game

Special points of interest:

- A Holistic Approach to Ergonomics Planning
- BIFMA's Ultimate Test for Fit
- OSHA's Ergonomic E-Tools
- Pre, Post Tests for Training

BIFMA Ultimate Test for Fit

The Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturer's Association (BIFMA) has developed the Ultimate Test for Fit, which are guidelines designed to identify the best fit for furniture used with VDTs (Visual Display terminals). The guidelines were designed using information from BIFMA's Ergonomics

Guideline for VDT Furniture used in Office Work Spaces.

The guidelines are a helpful reference when analyzing seated workstations, as they provide some specific information on a variety of different surfaces. The areas covered in the guidelines include: support surfaces for



input devices (keyboards and mice) and VDTs, clearances for sitting and standing, and chair dimensions. You may locate the Ultimate Test for Fit guidelines at www.bifma.org.

Industry Specific Ergonomic e-Tools from OSHA

Did you know that the U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has developed a line of Ergonomic e-tools that help employers to remedy common ergonomic hazards? This information is designed to specifically address issues that may contribute to musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) found in the workplace.

The difference in this information from other ergonomic information is that it is targeted to tasks found in specific industries. Specific guidelines as well as photos

of actual job processes can be found in these e-Tools. The industries include: Electrical contractors, baggage handling, beverage delivery, computer workstations, grocery warehousing, healthcare, poultry processing, printing industry and sewing (the sewing guidelines can be found in English and in Spanish).

As with any comprehensive ergonomics program, these tools are an excellent way to supplement existing evaluation and training processes. There are many more good resources that may be found on

OSHA's website. To locate them go to www.osha.gov, and check out the Compliance Assistance, e-Tools section.



Pre Test, Post Test: Reinforcing Ergonomics Training

How often have you provided training to employees, only to realize as you walk by their cubicle, that the workstation recommendations that were made in training were not carried out? How can you be sure that your employees are hearing and using the training information you provide? One way to do this is to provide pre and post training tests. Experts believe that by identifying concepts prior to the start of a training session, participants will be more likely to pay attention to the test question topics. Generally, they

want to know whether or not they got the answer correct on their pre test. A simple process for this is to review your training materials and prepare 10 true/

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false questions. Make sure the questions are varied and represent all topics covered in the training. Have all training

participants take the test beforehand and have them hold onto the tests as you proceed through the training. Let them know you will review all the topics throughout the session. At the end of the training, have the participants provide the answers as you ask the questions. This way, the group feels as if they learned something new, or reinforced something they already knew. Either way, you can be assured that they were focused on the training topics.

Pelletier & Associates, Inc.

Pelletier & Associates, Inc. is a disability management company with expertise in ergonomic workstation evaluation and ergonomics training, as well as return-to-work program development, job modification and workers' compensation.

With over 19 years of experience, we

target employers' concerns over high absenteeism and workers' comp claims by providing solutions and recommendations for worksite ergonomic problems. If you would like more information, or for a complimentary workstation evaluation, please contact us at (949) 206-9923.

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