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ERGONOMICS IN THE WORKPLACE

Ergonomics is an approach to promoting occupational health which has also has benefits in terms of employee satisfaction and efficiency.



In designing work systems, the emphasis is on designing tools, equipment and workplaces so that the job fits the person rather than the reverse. Approaches to prevention may be based on work design or organizational arrangements. The former relates to tools, machines, workplaces and workplace methods whilst the latter is concerned with selection and training, skills matching and job rotation methods. Usually a combination of these approaches is needed when resolving ergonomic problems that can lead to musculoskeletal disorders.

Musculoskeletal Disorders

Basically, they arise from damage to muscles and joints. They are not confined to particular industries or types of people.

Work-related problems are often caused by poor workplace or job design. These can lead to:

- Poor working positions
- Too much bending, stretching or effort required
- High levels of repetition
- Difficult manual handling tasks

The back, neck, shoulders and upper limbs are particularly at risk. You may be able to identify such health problems by any of the following:

- Injuries to backs and limbs
- Employee complaints and rest stops
- Poor product quality and/or individual performance
- DIY improvements to work stations and tools or 'self-help' health aids such as copper bracelets

Some musculoskeletal disorders develop slowly and it is important to catch them early. Reporting of aches and pains should be encouraged so that appropriate action can be taken.

The Need For Action

Several recent pieces of legislation require ergonomics related health and safety risks to be assessed as part of a company's overall Risk Assessment strategy. In addition, sickness, absence, high staff turnover, retraining, loss of production, compensation costs etc., will undoubtedly cost businesses money.

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Implementing Solutions

Solutions can be achieved by changing the designs of workstations, tools and work organization. Even simple solutions can make a marked improvement and are often easier to implement and adjust than rather more complex changes

Remember, by adapting jobs to suit the individuals doing them, fatigue can be reduced and motivation and job satisfaction (and ultimately productivity) increased. Less time is lost from employee absences due to sickness so ergonomics within the workplace is an issue which is important to address.



Ergonomics Checklist

- Do you have systems, procedures or 'attitudes' in place to help identify possible musculoskeletal disorders arising from work activities?
- Have you carried out appropriate risk assessments on hazardous activities?
- In trying to find ergonomic solutions, do you consult with your employees and match the job to the individual and not vice versa?

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