

### **IS YOUR COMPANY PROTECTED AGAINST MSDs ???**

Ergonomics-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) caused by repetitive strains, awkward positioning, vibration and other occupational risks, continue to be an ever-growing problem for employers. According to the 2008 Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index, overexertion injuries accounted for 25.7% of all reported injuries nationwide. This event category includes injuries related to lifting, pushing, pulling, holding, carrying, or throwing. Below is a summary of common workplace injuries taken from the 2008 Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index:

<b>Injury Type</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Percentage of Serious Injuries</b>
Overexertion Injuries	\$12.4 Billion	25.7%
Fall Injuries (Same Level)	\$6.4 Billion	13.3%
Fall Injuries (Lower Level)	\$5.3 Billion	10.8%
Repetitive Motion	\$4.0 Billion	02.0%

Companies that have implemented well-planned ergonomics programs have enjoyed great success with respect to employee safety and injury claim reductions. Since entering into an Ergonomic Strategic Partnership in 2003, OSHA, the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), the National Postal Mail Holders Union (NMHU) and the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) have reported the following results:

- Sites in the process for a full 3 years have experienced the most dramatic results:
  - 38% reduction in the MSD recordable rate.
  - 40% reduction in Handling & Lifting rate
- A \$1.8 million savings in workers' compensation medical costs (a 39% reduction).
- More than 77,000 employees have been trained.
- Nearly 7,000 ergonomic task analyses have been conducted and 3,600 fixes have been implemented.

Companies can partner with a certified ergonomic specialist to develop an ergonomics program to minimize the risk of future MSD injuries. A well-planned ergonomics program should include the following components:

- Worksite Analysis (to identify factors that contribute to MSDs)
- Hazard Prevention & Control
- Medical Management
- Training & Education

The purpose of conducting workplace analyses is to identify areas within the workplace that present risk factors which can likely lead to the development of MSD injuries. The most common workplace risk factors include the following:

- Repetitive & sustained motions of the upper extremity and whole body.
- Forceful exertions for the upper extremity and the whole body.
- Awkward postures for the upper extremity and whole body.
- Mechanical (local contact pressure)
- Vibration & temperature extremes.

A certified ergonomic specialist typically uses a “triage” approach when conducting these worksite analyses and can pick 2 or 3 of the following quantifiable survey tools to complete a thorough assessment of the workplace risk factors:

- ANSI-Z365 Proactive Job Survey
- Rapid Entire Body Assessment (REBA)
- Rapid Upper Limb Assessment (RULA)
- Strain Index
- Washington State Caution Zone & Hazard Zone Indexes

Once the factors are known and categorized (low, medium, high risk), the certified ergonomic specialist will work with the company to develop hazard prevention and control strategies to reduce or eliminate the risk factors. These prevention and control strategies typically include the following:

- **Engineering Controls** --- Making changes to work stations, equipment, tools, etc.
- **Work Practices** --- Making changes to company policies, safety training programs (such as safe lifting methods).
- **Administrative Controls** --- Controlling or manipulating an employees work schedule to allow for job rotation, more frequent rest periods, more staffing, etc.
- **Personal Protective Equipment** --- Offering the use of personal protective devices, which should only be done with ergonomic stressors in mind.

As the hazard prevention and control solutions are being put into place, it is very important to make sure that all employees, supervisors and managers within the company are trained and educated on how to actively participate in their own workplace safety. Employees should be well-trained on proper procedures to keep their risk for injury at a minimum. Supervisors need similar training, but also need to be trained how to recognize early symptoms, introduce corrective measures, and reinforce the company ergonomic program.

An effective medical management program is essential to the success of an ergonomic program. The medical management program should include the following:

- Leadership from a certified Occupational Medicine provider who is very familiar with the company and its ergonomics program.
- Training of all healthcare workers who work under the direction of the Occupational Medicine provider.
- Periodic symptoms surveys should be completed by employees to help measure the success of the ergonomic program.
- Compile a list of light duty job tasks for any employee who is returning to work after an injury.
- Encourage the reporting of early symptoms --- DO NOT allow the employee to wait until a condition becomes a serious injury.
- Make sure the Occupational Medicine provider is involved in all aspects of employee safety and health, not just the ergonomics program.

For more information about how the experts at SafeWorks Illinois can help your company with its ergonomic and medical management programs, please call (217) 356-6150 or visit us online at [www.safeworksillinois.com](http://www.safeworksillinois.com)