

Workplaces can benefit from ergonomics group

Committee needs to be supplied with information and tools

By Trevor Schell
GUEST COLUMNIST

One of the most common recommendations with respect to ergonomics from the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (Sudbury) is the formation of a Joint Ergonomics Committee to deal with just ergonomic concerns in the workplace.

Does your workplace need an ergonomics committee?

Have there been Workers' Compensation claims for musculoskeletal (muscle/bone) injuries at your workplace?

Are workers absent because of discomfort?

Do first aid reports indicate workers are having musculoskeletal discomfort or pain?

Are there some jobs that have a high turnover because workers find tasks too physically demanding?

Are any workers wearing wrist or elbow splints?

Are there some jobs at your workplace that are repetitive or require awkward postures and/or high force?

If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, your workplace would benefit from an Ergonomics Committee.

The committee will need to be supplied with education on relevant issues and tools in order to implement the program. Such topics include:

- General introduction to ergonomics
- Assessment tools such as anthropometrics, NIOSH equation and Snook tables
- How to identify ergonomic concerns and risk factors

Ergonomics Committee(s) need goals and objectives, for example:

- To reduce work related musculoskeletal disorders by 20% in the next two years
- To reduce the percentage of people with upper limb discomfort by 20% in the next year
- To make 50% of shared workstations height adjustable in the next six months



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Here are some factors to consider when forming an ergonomics committee:

- Negotiate an Ergonomics Committee into the collective agreement
- Some corporations have corporate policies that include Ergonomic Committees or Teams.
- The Joint Health and Safety Committee can recommend formation of an Ergonomics Committee.

An ergonomics committee should receive full support from all different sectors of the workforce of the program is going to work.

- **Workers:** They know their needs and the needs of their co-workers
- **Joint health and safety committee members:** Members on both committees will ensure there must be good communication between the Ergonomics Committee and JH&SC
- **Production and/or business unit managers who have decision making authority:** Some members should have the authority to make decisions, so money is available for necessary changes
- **Engineers who are involved in the layout and design of workstations:** Ergonomic principles are integrated into workstation designs

The Ergonomics Committee should be comprised of a broad cross-section of workplace parties. If ergonomics committee members represent different departments of the workforce, members of the committee could focus on different departments.

Two or three people could be assigned to providing ergonomic services to a department.

- **Trevor Schell is an ergonomist with the Occupational Health Clinic (Sudbury). If you have an occupational health topic you would like addressed on a future column, contact the OHCOW at 523-2330.**