Managing Risk Through Ergonomics

Ergonomics reduces absenteeism and improves employee welfare

KOS Ergonomic Solutions

• Specialists in equipment, furniture and other solutions to:
  – Create an ergonomic, productive environment
  – Manage and prevent back pain, neck pain, and other musculoskeletal disorders
  – Improve productivity and reduce absenteeism

What is ergonomics?

Evolution???

Most common environmental problems

• Incorrect desk height
• Unsuitable chair
• Incorrect positioning of equipment
• Feet can’t touch ground
• Job does not incorporate movement
• Insufficient lighting
• Trip hazards

IBEC and SFA Report

• Absence levels: Average 2.58%. In companies employing over 500 employees rise to 3.58%
• 8 million workdays are lost each year due to absenteeism.
• Back pain/injury and stress are the most commonly cited problems on medical certs
• Cost of absence annually: €900m
What does absence cost your company?

- Loss of output of injured employee
- Loss of output employee covering
- Overtime cost for cover
- Loss of potential income due to delayed work
- Temporary staff

Presenteeism

Early intervention
- Increases productivity and
- Improves individuals moral and confidence
- Reduces stress levels

Importance of Movement

- We can spend up to 95% of our working day sitting

- We need to move!!!

- Movement keeps the spine healthy, improves circulation & reduces muscle fatigue

How does ergonomic furniture minimise risks for MSDs?

- An ergonomic workstation will:
  - Place joints in a neutral position
  - Avoid continuously bending forward
  - Minimise Repetitive movements
  - Avoid a twisted spine that strains the back
  - Allows you to alternate posture as well as movements
  - Avoid excessive reaches

The Safety, Health and Welfare at work (General Application) Regulations 2007

- Ensure general use of equipment is not source of risk

- To comply you must:
  - Carry out risk assessment
  - Provide training on safe use of VDU
  - Inform of entitlement to eyesight test
  - Perform further assessment if new workstation or using new equipment/technology

VDU Assessment: Employers duties

- Competent person with necessary skills, training and experience

- Physical risk assessment of each individuals’ workstation

- Can’t use software packages to self assess

- Appropriate steps must be taken to control risks identified

- Periodic breaks/changes of routine

- Written copy and shared with employee
VDU Assessments an opportunity

- to listen to employees
- to catch problem early
- to react early

Proactive vs Reactive Approaches

- **Proactive Ergonomics**
  - Preventing work related MSDs by recognising, anticipating and reducing risk factors in the planning stages of workplaces or new systems of work.
  - Include health and safety / risk management staff in purchase of furniture and equipment.
  - Proper selection and use of equipment, job methods, workstation layouts and materials
  - Design for as many people as possible and understand ergonomic principles of posture and movement

Proactive Ergonomics Case Studies

**Big Four Accountancy Firm**

- Many employees use laptops in the office and externally.
- Neck and shoulder pain is common complaint.
- Solution: Laptop pack – a laptop stand and mini keyboard.
- Research using laptop packs
  - 32% decrease in mechanical load placed on the neck
  - 21% increase in comfort
  - 17% increase in productivity

Study in AA Call Centre, Newcastle, England

- Response time for incoming calls fell by 58%
- Sales factor rose by 9.4%

**Better chairs. Better business.**

- Reduces absenteeism by 2 percent.
- Reduces rehabilitation costs.
- Increases productivity by as much as 10 percent.

= Improved profitability
Reactive Approaches

• Dealing with problem cases
• Manage the injury before it worsens
• Adapt a Stay at Work program and a Return to Work Program
• More cost effective to reduce risk factors at the design stage
  – Additional costs are incurred in redesigning or modifying work processes

Reactive Ergonomics Case Studies

Multi-National Medical Devices Manufacturer

• Employee suffered severe recurring back pain
  – Pain killers needed. Attended pain specialist and Occupational Therapist
• Poor posture in the work area identified as a contributing factor.
• Solution:
  • Chair provided to support user and adapted to suit the high work bench and tasks necessary
    – Chair training and ergonomic guidance was given to employee
  • User is off pain killers, pain decreased significantly and overall comfort levels improved.
  • Her posture has improved greatly and no longer slouches

Busy Currency Trader

• History of stress
• Back and neck pain
• Regular short term absence from work

Solution:
• Height Adjustable Workstation
• Dynamic Moving chair
• Adjustable Multiple Monitor Arm with logical Screen Arrangement
• Posture guidance and follow up
• Full return to work after one month

Returning to Work

Health and Productivity RTW Model

• Proactive RTW programs reduce lost time costs, increase employee satisfaction and benefit the employer.
• Employees who are satisfied with their employer’s response to injury or illness return to work 50% faster with 54% lower cost.
• Supportive work environments are highly predictive of successful RTW. Workers in highly supportive organizations are 4 times more likely to successfully function at work after returning to work.
• When opportunities for transitional work or light duty assignments are available, disabled individuals are twice as likely to successfully resume work following an injury

Website: www.kos.ie
Email: sales@kos.ie
Phone: 0504 43341
What Increases the likelihood of going back to work?

- The worker’s belief in a high probability of returning to work
- Flexible employee benefits that support continued work with an impairment
- Non-hostile work environment
- Timely application (within the first 30 days of an injury or illness) of return to work programs
- Correct ergonomic environment – a workplace that is suitable to this particular individual’s needs.

Key Strategies for RTW

- Ergonomic assessments ensuring work environment is not cause of aggravating injury
- Transitional work – incremental resumption of work tasks during a well defined time frame
- Limited light duty assignments to maintain safe work function during periods of impairment
- Written RTW policies that define the RTW process with specific guidelines and accountabilities

Take away points

- Intervene early
- Involve the employee in the solution
- Focus on capacity not incapacity
- Set up the work place to suit the individuals needs

Take away points

- Don’t wait for the problem
  – Put a Stay at Work Program and Return to Work Program into place
- Work on improving employee welfare
- Undertake workplace health promotion

Appendix 1: VDU Regulations (from HSA’s website)

- Who is covered by the Display Screen Equipment Regulation 2007?
  - If the employee has no choice but to use the VDU to carry out her/his work
  - If the employee normally uses the VDU for continuous periods of more than one hour
  - If the VDU is generally used by the employee on a daily basis

- What constitutes a workstation under the Display Screen Equipment Regulation 2007?
  - "workstation" means an assembly comprising display screen equipment, which may be provided with a keyboard or input device or software, or a combination of the foregoing, determining the operator and machine interface, and includes—
    - (a) a work chair and work desk or work surface,
    - (b) any optional accessories and peripherals, and
    - (c) the immediate work environment of the display screen equipment.

VDU Regulations continued

- How should a workstation analysis or risk assessment be carried out?
  - Stage 1: Initial consultation with the employee
  - Stage 2: Observation of the employee working at the computer workstation
  - Stage 3: Identify the issues that need to be addressed
  - Stage 4: Review the implementation of the action plan
- Please note: Schedule 4 details minimum requirements for all Display Screen Equipment that should be in place for Display Screen Equipment workstations.
- For complete information, please see: [http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Workplace_Health/Display_Screen_Equipment/Display_Screen_Equipment.html#dselaw](http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Workplace_Health/Display_Screen_Equipment/Display_Screen_Equipment.html#dselaw)
James Kennedy, 
Ergonomic Product Consultant

Website: www.kos.ie
Phone: 01 6110 200 / 087 757 3320
Email: james@kos.ie