

Safety Cop



Address MSD's Now, Even Without OSHA Standard

Ergonomic issues and their related costs are not limited to workers' compensation premiums. Even without a formal standard, OSHA inspectors may use the catch-all "General Duty Clause" to levy fines for ergonomic shortcomings.

Proactive employers can address repetitive motion and cumulative trauma disorders (CTD's) that injure workers in a variety of industries. The most widely known CTD is carpal tunnel syndrome. It and other musculoskeletal disorders (MSD's) can be caused by repeated motion, twisting and improper lifting. Preventing them requires examining the tasks performed and the workplace itself to ensure a proper "fit" between job and worker.

Often, simple steps can successfully address ergonomic problems: engineering and administrative controls, job redesign, replacement or adjustment of work stations, new tools, and education. Proper body mechanics and physical fitness also help reduce MSD problems.

For claims already filed, perform a trend analysis of injury patterns.

Then look at the physical operation for injury-causing conditions and acts.

Some keys:

- How do workers stand, hold a tool, reach over, lift or bend?
- Do they perform the same motion repeatedly?
- Are workers observed in awkward positions or postures?
- Have computer monitors and keyboards been adjusted to suit the worker?
- Are desks or workstations the proper height?
- Are employees reporting any MSD-related symptoms?
- If these injuries are common, what is done to address them?

Employers can reduce the risk of MSD's and CTDs. The debate over ergonomic standards won't go away, but with the right approach many of these injuries might disappear.

