

ERGONOMICS ON THE JOB

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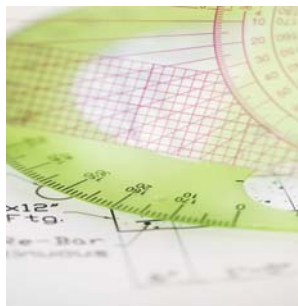
MEASURING ROI ON ERGONOMICS

In today's business world, company executives are looking for valuable ways to increase the bottom line. And in many cases increasing that bottom line is not just the increase in *income* but rather the decrease in *expenses*. And one of a company's largest expenses can be Workers' Compensation costs. But often it is difficult to get upper management to see the value in spending dollars combating those rising costs unless a clear ROI—Return on Investment—can be shown. And how can those of us in the area of disability management do that? The best way is to start with simple steps and easily recordable information.

For example, although stud-

ies have shown that training provides a positive impact on workers in the area of safety and prevention, how can that be tied to your organization? One method is to identify how much of your time is spent educating, identifying, addressing and remedying ergonomic issues in the workplace. How many times a day do you receive a phone call regarding someone needing a new piece of equipment, or a supervisor is referring an employee with complaints of discomfort for you to handle? If the workforce were given some basic ergonomic information and tools (checklists, vendor/equipment lists, stretch cards), would they be able to handle some of these

problems themselves, thereby rectifying the situation much more quickly and leaving the more complex issues to be handled by the



person with the most expertise. Training may cost money, but it saves so much more in the long run by giving employees the information they need to make the small changes that really make a difference.

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ARE BLACKBERRYS A MAJOR PAIN?

BlackBerrys are the latest electronic device trend moving from wealthier circles, to mainstream America and we can't live without them, right? Although they are fun and addictive, some users have reported that overuse of these portable e-mail devices have presented some hand discomfort issue that worry experts. The American

Society of Hand Therapists cautions against excessive use of the devices, as they may contribute to repetitive stress injuries. As people's lives become more fast paced and the demand for constant communication at our fingertips rises, individuals may experience "BlackBerry thumb" a condition so called because of the

swelling of tendons in the thumb related to the overuse of thumbs to type on the small keypad. The solution? Aside from not using the device, one should limit the amount of time spent continuously using the device an old adage says it best— everything in moderation!

SYMPTOM SURVEYS - ARE THEY VALUABLE?

With the need for employers to develop methods to identify ergonomic problems in the workplace before they become significant, some companies are looking at the use of symptom surveys. A symptom survey is basically a tool to help individuals identify pain or discomfort. It has been used for years by physicians, chiropractors, physical therapists and the like, but now companies and ergonomics professionals are using these self-report measures to obtain a more accurate picture of the impact of work related musculoskeletal disorders.

A symptom survey is generally a two page form, which allows an individual to document not only specifics about their job tasks and physical demands—such as time spent sitting, standing, etc.—but also provides a section to provide more detailed information about

the pain. The survey allows the individual to report on the type of discomfort, such as burning, aching, swelling, stiffness, etc., and the details such as the first occurrence, level of discomfort and frequency of the symptom. Much of this information can provide a clearer picture as to the causes of the discomfort

and help to determine if the causes are linked to workplace behaviors.

The American Journal of Industrial Medicine has reported that

these subjective measures may a valuable approach in ergonomics, due to the ability of individuals to more accurately report on the overlapping symptom patterns that characterize work-related musculoskeletal disorders (Schierhout & Myers, 1996).

Symptom surveys have also been found useful in helping to modify jobs. The reported symptoms can be matched to the job duties that are most affected and enable the worker and employer to develop strategies for dealing with these potential changes to the job. By involving the worker in the process, employers are likely to get suggestions that have a higher likelihood of being followed, thereby further minimizing the risk of an on the job injury.



TRAINING TIPS

Ergonomics training may not be the most exciting topic, but it doesn't have to be boring either. Employee Awareness Training is valuable, but only if it makes a difference and the participants are kept interested in the topic. Although this is always a challenge when it comes to training, there are a few tips to making the training experi-

ence pay off, both for the company and the employee.

1. *Keep it moving*—oftentimes training is long, but does not cover topics in a rapid pace. Long explanations or complex handouts are often used to drive a point home. Make sure you cover a variety of topics

briefly.

2. *Get the audience involved*—people love talking about themselves; elicit real world examples and incorporate them into the training.
3. *Use feedback information*—Most trainers pass out evaluations, but it's important to listen to what the employees consider useful information, and incorporate those ideas the next time around.

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PELLETIER & ASSOCIATES, INC.

Pelletier & Associates, Inc. is a disability management services company with expertise in ergonomic workstation evaluation and training, as well as return-to-work program development and Workers' Compensation services. With over 19 years of experience, we target employers' concerns over high absenteeism

and workers' comp claims by providing solutions and recommendations for these issues.

For more information, or for a complimentary workstation evaluation, please contact us at (949) 206-9923.

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