Ergonomics

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) affect the muscles, nerves, blood vessels, ligaments and tendons. Workers in many different industries and occupations can be exposed to risk factors at work, such as lifting heavy items, bending, reaching overhead, pushing and pulling heavy loads, working in awkward body postures and performing the same or similar tasks repetitively.

Impact of MSDs in the Workplace

Work-related MSDs are among the most frequently reported causes of lost or restricted work time. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in 2013, MSD cases accounted for 33% of all worker injury and illness cases.

A Process for Protecting Workers

Employers are responsible for providing a safe and healthful workplace for their workers. In the workplace, the number and severity of MSDs resulting from physical overexertion, and their associated costs, can be substantially reduced by applying ergonomic principles.

Implementing an ergonomic process is effective in reducing the risk of developing MSDs in high-risk industries as diverse as construction, firefighting, office jobs, healthcare, transportation and warehousing. The following are important elements of an ergonomic process:

Provide Management Support - A strong commitment by management is critical to the overall success of an ergonomic process. Management should define clear goals and objectives for the ergonomic process, discuss them with their workers, assign responsibilities to designated staff members, and identify and provide important information about hazards in their workplaces.

Provide Training - Training is an important element in the ergonomic process. It ensures that workers are aware of ergonomics and its benefits, become informed about ergonomics related concerns in the workplace, and understand the importance of reporting early symptoms of MSDs.

Encourage Early Reporting of MSD Symptoms - Early reporting can accelerate the job assessment and improvement process, helping to prevent or reduce the progression of symptoms, the development of serious injuries, and subsequent lost-time claims.

General Signs of MSDs

- Less strength for gripping
- Less range of motion
- Loss of muscle function
- Inability to do everyday tasks

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