



Ergo Tip of the Month - April 2008

Don't Forget About Safety When Installing Ergonomic Assists

Ergonomic improvements are a constant on-going part of the day to day business in industry today with potentially hundreds of changes being made daily to reduce the risk of injury to the worker. When these ergonomic changes are being made or proposed, however, new hazards may be introduced to the worker that may not be known or considered by the Ergonomist or Ergonomics team member. It is therefore imperative when making changes to improve the ergonomics of a job that your Health & Safety team is involved to ensure that all potential safety concerns have been addressed.

According to the General Duties clause as set out by the Occupational Health & Safety Administration (OSHA):

(a) Each employer

(1) shall furnish to each of his/her employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his/her employees;

(2) shall comply with occupational safety and health standards promulgated under this Act.

(b) Each employee shall comply with occupational safety and health standards and all rules, regulations, and orders issued pursuant to this Act which are applicable to his/her own actions and conduct.

Therefore the employer is responsible for providing a safe and healthy work environment for the workers. Below, Reference 1 provides a link to OSHA, and reference 2 provides a link to the Ontario Ministry of Labour (MOL) in Canada, which may be accessed for further health and safety information and regulations.

Common Application of an Ergonomic Improvement:

A lift assist is a common aid that is used throughout industry whether in a hospital, nursing home or manufacturing facility. By taking the weight of the load out of the workers hands you are significantly reducing the risk of injury to the worker.

Can you think of any Safety Hazards that are associated with a new lift assist? A few potential safety hazards are listed below:

1. Are all overhead restraints secured properly, with secondary restraints?
2. Has a certified load study been completed on the tool being installed?
3. Are walking working surfaces clean, lying completely flat, free from any defects and appropriate for the area?

In the event that any platforming is required, is it properly guarded where necessary and color coded to avoid the potential of slips, trips and falls?

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The potential safety hazards will need to be reviewed and addressed by a safety engineer, or safety team, during the design and installation of a lift assist to ensure that the ergonomic assist has not introduced any other risk of injury to the worker.

Team Approach:

The best approach to take when recommending and/or making ergonomic related improvements is a team approach. Safety is everybody's responsibility!

References:

1. Occupational Health & Safety Administration – www.osha.gov
2. Ontario Ministry of Labour - <http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/>

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