



Ergo Tip of the Month - October 2008

Proactive Change Management

It does not seem possible that the nights are getting cooler and the stores have already begun to decorate for Halloween and Christmas. The kids are back in school and we are rapidly approaching that time of year when businesses will begin to develop objectives and budgets for the upcoming year.

Now is the time to look back at 2008 and take stock of what was accomplished and how the significant changes that took place during the year may have affected your workplaces. For many companies this past year brought reductions in the work force, major modifications to manufacturing schedules, significant turnover of personnel, and tighter spending guidelines. Any one of these could have impacted your ergonomics processes and workers and, in combination, could have changed the workplace environment entirely.

Reductions in the work force usually result in the movement of people from one job to another or in the rebalancing of work elements and redistribution of tasks. Those of us responsible for ergonomics processes must be aware of these changes and make sure we are assessing those modified jobs for new stresses that may have been introduced. As jobs are combined, the overall metabolic loads may have increased, recovery times redistributed and postures changed.

Modified manufacturing schedules may have resulted in shift changes and revised workstation layout configurations. In July, the Ergo Tip addressed the impact of disruptions to Circadian rhythms, the biological clock. Making the change to a different work schedule can introduce multiple physical and psychological stresses to those workers affected. Modifications to workstation layouts should be reviewed to assure that reaches and postures are within acceptable limits, walking has been optimized, and parts and tools are efficiently located.

Employee turnover, of both manufacturing and non-manufacturing personnel, can have a major impact on the effectiveness of your ergonomics process. Experienced workers have developed "tricks" or methods that minimize the stresses to which they are exposed. New workers may experience difficulty with certain tasks until they condition the muscles being used and they develop a knack for their new jobs. New supervisors may not be aware of the ergonomics accommodations that have been put in place to reduce injuries and may not be aware of the proper techniques for using tools and equipment. Education and training of new employees should include an ergonomics component to enable them to understand the purpose and benefits of ergonomics within their new environment.

And finally, spending guidelines may have been tightened, making it more difficult to justify the purchase of adjustable workstations and ergonomic tools and equipment. New emphasis may be placed on having a strong business case for your proposed expenditures and purchases. Keep good records and support your funding request with data on the costs of poor ergonomics.

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This month is National Ergonomics Month. Begin building awareness within your company today and highlight the positive contributions that your ergonomics process has made to improving the quality of lives, improving productivity, and reducing costs. As you begin the process of developing objectives and preparing budgets for 2009, take time to reflect on 2008 and how the ergonomics process has contributed to helping manage the significant challenges and changes of the past year and how ergonomics will continue to contribute in the future.

For further information on National Ergonomics Month you may visit the following Human Factor and Ergonomic Society sites:

<http://hfesnem.org/>

<http://www.hfes.org/web/natergomonth/natergomonth.html>

Sandalwood Enterprises is a consulting firm that specializes in Ergonomics, Process Optimization, and Information Management. The Ergo Tip of the Month is offered to our customers and friends for the benefit of the Ergonomics community.

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