Simple Ergonomic Steps To A More Productive Workplace

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Workplace ergonomics is getting a lot of attention nationwide in response to a sharp increase in incidents of repetitive strain injuries resulting in musculoskeletal disorders, such as carpal tunnel syndrome. Occupational diseases often mean repeated surgery, intractable pain, inability to work, time off for the affected employee and, ultimately, higher costs for the employer. Listed below are four steps a company can take to address this growing problem:

Step One: review tasks for risk factors: the first step to correcting problems is to understand the key workplace ergonomic risk factors and review work tasks in your operation to see which ones apply. This can make a tremendous difference, since occupational safety professionals estimate that reducing physical stresses could eliminate as much as half the serious injuries that happen each year.

Step Two: control risk factors with engineering and administrative controls and personal equipment where it is effective: engineering controls to improve ergonomic risks may include changing the way parts and materials are transported or changing the process to reduce how workers are exposed to risk factors.

Step Three: understand how to make the work space work ergonomically: with any task, selecting the proper tool is crucial. The key is to understand the work process and employee's safety needs involved. After identifying the likely risk factors in an operation, develop a safer work environment by carefully selecting the tools and work stations workers will use.

Step Four: use work station design principles to improve ergonomics: the following strategies typically yield safe work environments: 1) make the work station adjustable 2) locate materials to reduce twisting 3) avoid static loads and fixed work postures 4) set the work surface to the particular task 5) provide adjustable chairs 6) allow workers to alternate between standing and sitting 7) support the limbs 8) use gravity 9) design for proper movements 10) consider computer monitors 11) provide simple dials and displays 12) consider overall environmental conditions.

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