

For Global Ergonomics Month, Consider Ergonomics in Hazard Assessments



October is Global Ergonomics Month, which is intended to draw attention to the ergonomics-related hazards in workplaces that can cause musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs), that is, injuries that affect tendons, muscles, nerves and joints'often in the neck, upper and lower back, chest, shoulders, arms and hands.

MSIs are one of the most common categories of workplace injuries. They can be caused by:

- Infrequent breaks
- Exposure to excessive vibrations
- Improper lifting techniques
- Poor posture while working (watch this animated guide on good posture in offices).

A key step in protecting workers from developing MSIs is to consider ergonomics when conducting hazard assessments, such as by evaluating not only the equipment a worker must use when performing a particular job but also his body's position when using that equipment. For example, does he have to hunch over' Are his arms stretched out awkwardly' Does the equipment vibrate a lot'

When we recently asked if you consider ergonomics when conducting hazard assessments, we were pleased to see that 53% said yes, ergonomics was considered for all hazard assessments and 38% considered it but only for assessments of certain jobs, equipment and tools.

Bottom line: If you're *not* considering ergonomics in your hazard assessments, you should start doing so or you may fail to identify risks to your workers' health.

To comply with requirements under the OHS laws to address ergonomics-related hazards, take these four steps:

Step #1: Identify and assess ergonomics-related hazards, such as those posed by pushing and pulling materials or equipment.

Step #2: Take steps to eliminate the identified hazards, such as by lowering shelves, raising seats or making other adjustments to work stations.

Step #3: Implement safe work procedures for activities likely to cause MSIs, such as manual materials handling.

Step #4: Train workers on how to protect themselves from MSIs, such as by using safe lifting techniques.

The OHS Insider has many model tools, including forms, checklists and policies available for you to download, adapt and use in your own workplace to prevent workers from developing MSIs:

- Ergonomics-Related Injury Records Review Form
- Model Ergonomics Policy
- Pushing/Pulling Risk Assessment Form
- Lifting Hazard Assessment Checklist
- Office Ergonomics Risk Factor Checklist
- Manual Handling Checklist
- Model Worker MSI Symptom Survey.