

# Making Ergonomics Changes Improves Safety for US Plant Workers



According to figures from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, injuries among workers at poultry and meat packing and processing plants throughout the US are at an all-time low.

The rate of occupational illnesses and injuries dropped to 6.4 per 100 workers in 2011, from 6.9 in 2010, a 7% improvement. Not bad considering that just 10 years ago, the rate had been 14.7 per 100 workers.

What's the reason for this improvement? J. Patrick Boyle, president and CEO of the American Meat Institute (AMI) attributes the reduction in injuries and illnesses to voluntary ergonomic guidelines developed by OSHA, the US meat industry and the United Food and Commercial Workers' Union, along with a number of safety improvements initiated by the AMI Worker Safety Committee.

There are two take-aways from the US experience in this industry:

First, making often simple ergonomics-related changes to work stations, tools, processes, etc. can reap big rewards for both workers and employers. For articles, tools and other information on how you can implement ergonomics into your workplace, go to the OHS Insider's Ergonomics Compliance Centre, where you'll find:

- 7 strategies for making your ergonomics program a success
- The ergonomics requirements in the OHS laws
- Information to help you justify investing in ergonomics to senior management
- An ergonomic risk factor checklist.

For videos, safety talks and other training material on ergonomics, go to SafetySmart. Not a subscriber to SafetySmart? Sign up for a free trial.

You can also buy a S.A.F.E. System on ergonomics, which includes posters, a safety meeting outline, table tents and safety cards for workers.

Second, just because a safety standard is voluntary doesn't mean you shouldn't comply with it. Companies get fixated on complying with the OHS requirements

with which they *must* comply and too often pass on implementing voluntary standards, arguing that it costs too much money and time to do so.

But as the US statistics show, compliance with voluntary standards, such as those from the CSA, can improve health and safety and thus the bottom line.

In addition, complying with voluntary standards can help you prove due diligence by showing that you took all reasonable steps'including those that weren't mandated'to protect workers. In fact, courts may look to voluntary standards to determine what steps would be reasonable to take in a given situation, thus effectively making such standards mandatory. (This PowerPoint presentation by OHS lawyer Norm Keith explains in detail the role of voluntary standards in safety prosecutions.)