

Manager/Supervisor Risk Management

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A twice weekly e-mail training for YCPARMIA members

TOPIC: SAFETY – ERGONOMIC ENGINEERING/INSPECTION

Repetitive motion injuries logically require repetitive motions. It is the body's reaction to ergonomic stressors that cause the injury (and expense). Generally if the physical stress on the worker's body is modified or ended in time, we have no injury. It is not uncommon to find, in hindsight, that the injured worker was their own worst enemy. The warning signs, usually discomfort or pain, are ignored or unhealthy work environments are accepted with predictable results.

Experience has suggested that the exposed worker (often the best and most dedicated employee) should not be expected to exercise good judgment or adequate care for themselves. It is therefore essential that their supervisor recognize the developing injury, and intercede. While it might seem to be an intrusion, it should be remembered that failure to do so could result in their employer incurring the cost of workers' compensation benefits, and the reduction or loss of the injured worker's services – possibly on a permanent basis.

In summary the supervisor is expected to recognize the exposure and take immediate action to protect their worker. Generally this involves an inspection to recognize the risk factors, and re-engineering the work space or activity to minimize or eliminate the risk of injury. These steps might include:

- Watching and listening to their workers for signs of discomfort or complaints;
- Using common sense to recognize work conditions that do not fit the individual worker;
- Not accepting that this is the way we have always done it, or this is the way it has always been;
- Bringing in a professional to inspect the work environment, and recommend changes (YCPARMIA provides this service at no charge for our members);
- Bringing in a professional to conduct a job hazard analysis (again, a service offered by YCPARMIA);
- Working with your department and/or human resources to implement recommended changes;
- Taking immediate advantage of “quick simple fixes” and monitor to see if there is improvement;
- Participating in, or requesting ergonomic training (again, offered by YCPARMIA);
- Providing a record of the injury and your actions (required by OSHA) to the supervisor responsible for the entity's ergonomic program; and,
- Not letting the injured worker control the process – their control has often contributed to the growing exposure; it is amazing how often workers put their work station back to the pre-inspection condition for convenience, and are then surprised when their discomfort returns.

Of course, there is an elephant under the carpet – cost. New equipment or up-graded work stations can be cost prohibitive. But, many of the existing items and processes can be modified or adjusted to lessen the risk. There are usually simple, low cost solutions that can have immediate and positive results. When ignored, and injury occurs, the solutions inevitably become more expensive.

Next Topic: Safety – Ergonomics – Risk Factors