Ergonomics: Recognizing Potential Problems



Safety Talk

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

By understanding the basics of ergonomics and how they relate to your job, you may be able to prevent painful injuries.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

When work stations and or work processes don't fit the person doing the work, injuries can result.

EXAMPLE

Damage to your back, neck, shoulders, elbows and other areas can be caused by doing repetitive work or working in an awkward position.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Use ergonomics to identify and correct problems. Make adjustments to your work habits and your work area so you can work comfortably without stress or strain.

- **Back strain**– is a common injury caused by sitting or standing in an incorrect position for extended periods of time. You may be able to prevent back injuries by using a footrest or a multi-position work station where you can either sit or stand. By changing positions frequently, you can ease the strain on back and leg muscles.
- **Neck strain**– can be caused by holding your arms in an incorrect position. The extra stress on the arms and hands will affect the neck muscles as well. For computer users the top of the screen should be at eye level.
- **Carpal Tunnel Syndrome**– is another repetitive strain injury which can permanently disable the hands and wrists. The major factor with a CTS injury is the hand and wrist positioning. An incorrect height or an awkward bent-wrist position will increase the risk dramatically. Is your work table set at a comfortable height? How about your chair or stool? Do you keep your arms in a "neutral" or level position? Examples of occupations which have a high rate of CTS are carpenters, cashiers and airline reservation agents.
- **Shoulder strain**– is common when your supplies are positioned at an awkward height. Excessive bending, stretching or lifting can put added pressure on the shoulder joint. Can you re-organize your work area to eliminate this strain?

- **Muscle tension**– can be caused by many things including working too long in the same position, and even stress. Do you incorporate some short breaks and stretching exercises into your work day to avoid strain injuries and fatigue? Simple stretching, flexing and strength building exercises can decrease your chances of injury. Warming up with a few exercises before you begin work is also important.

FINAL WORD

Pay attention to how you feel when you are working. Learn to use the science of ergonomics to help you work more comfortably and safely.