Elements of an Ergonomic Program

The goal of any safety and health program is to prevent injuries and illnesses by removing their causes. For ergonomic hazards, this goal is achieved through taking steps to eliminate or reduce worker exposure to conditions that lead to work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs) and related injuries and illnesses.

The science of ergonomics seeks to optimize the efficiency of work by adapting the workplace to the worker. A job can be performed in a safer and more productive manner when the design of tasks, workstations, and tools match the capabilities and limitations of the workers. Many companies within Manitoba, in industries ranging from meat processing to furniture manufacturing, health care to office environments, have found that instituting programs in ergonomics has reduced injuries, reduced compensation costs, and improved productivity.

Program Elements:

1. **Management Commitment**

2. **Employee Involvement**

3. **Training and Education**

4. **Identification of Problem Jobs**

5. **Development of Solutions**

6. **Disability Management**

Key Elements of an Ergonomics Program
If you review the literature on ergonomics, talk to the experts, and consult with companies who have implemented ergonomic programs, you will find that there are a distinct set of elements that have proven to be highly effective in dealing with ergonomic problems.

These six key Elements of an Ergonomics Program are:

1. **Management Commitment**

Occupational safety and health literature stresses that management commitment is key to the success of any safety and health effort. Management commitment demonstrates the employer's belief that ergonomic efforts are essential

1. **Management Commitment (cont'd)**

to a safe and health work environment for all employees. Specific ways in which management commitment can be demonstrated include: assigning staff specifically to the ergonomics program and providing time during the workday for these staff to deal with ergonomic concerns; establishing goals for the ergonomics program and evaluating results;

communicating to all staff the program's importance (perhaps through policy statements, written programs, or both); and, making resources available for the ergonomics improvements or providing training to all employees or to staff assigned to the ergonomics program.

2. **Employee Involvement**

Involving employees, both

2. Employee Involvement (cont'd)

individually and through the joint Health & Safety Committee, in efforts to improve workplace conditions provides a number of benefits, including enhancing employee motivation and job satisfaction, improving problem-solving capabilities, and increasing the likelihood that employees will accept changes in the job or work methods. Some of the ways in which employee involvement can be demonstrated include:
creating committees or teams; undertaking campaigns to solicit employee reports of potential problems and suggestions for improving job operations or conditions; and, administering periodic surveys to obtain employee reactions to workplace conditions so that employees may point out or confirm problems.

3. Training and Education

Identifying and controlling ergonomic injuries requires some level of knowledge of ergonomics and skills in remedying ergonomic hazards. Recognizing and filling different training needs is an important step in building an effective program. The different types of training that a facility might offer include: overall ergonomics awareness training; targeted training for specific groups of employees because of the jobs they do, the risks they face, or their roles in the program (e.g. for engineers to prevent and correct ergonomic hazards through equipment design, purchase, or maintenance); or for members of an ergonomics team to perform job analysis and develop controls.

4. Identification of Problem Jobs

A necessary component of any ergonomics program is the gathering of information to determine the scope and characteristics of the hazard that is contributing to the injury. Especially in this element, research has highlighted a wide variety of ways employers can identify problem jobs or job tasks. For example, a relatively straightforward way to identify problem jobs is for employers to focus on those jobs where there is already evidence that the job is a problem, because injuries have already occurred or symptoms have been
reported. For further details on this area, please refer to the *Contacts & References* section below.

5. Development of Solutions

The first step in eliminating the hazard is to analyze the job or job task to identify the ergonomic hazards present in the job. Once ergonomic hazards have been identified, the next step is to develop controls to eliminate or reduce these hazards. The *Contacts & References* below are available to guide you on some techniques that can be used to evaluate the work conditions within your facility.

6. Disability Management

A workplace-based disability management program is an important part of the employer's overall effort to reduce the impact of work-related injuries. Disability management emphasizes the prevention of Chronic disability and impairment through timely reporting of injuries, early intervention, prompt treatment and accommodation of temporary work restrictions as may be required under the circumstances. Please contact the Workers Compensation Board for further information on proper reporting procedures and effective disability management program planning; see the *Contacts & References* section.