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Record Number: 312870
Subfile: OSHLINE
Title: Active epidemiological surveillance of shoe factory
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Source: Occupational and environmental medicine
 452-458
ISSN: 1351-0711
Publication Year: 2002
Descriptor(s): SHOES INDUSTRY // MUSCULOSKELE

Abstract: OBJECTIVES: (1) to evaluate an active method of surveillance of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs); and (2) to compare different criteria for deciding whether or not a work situation could be considered at high risk of MSDs in a large, modern shoe factory. METHODS: A total of 253 blue collar workers were interviewed and examined in 1997. Risk factors for MSDs were assessed for each worker by standardised job site work analysis. Prevalence and incidence rates of carpal tunnel syndrome, rotator cuff syndrome, and tension neck syndrome were compared. RESULTS: On each of the nine main types of work situations identified on the basis of prevalence data, three types of work situation were detected to be at high risk of MSDs. The three types of work situations identified on the basis of prevalence data (sewing preparation, mechanised assembling, and finishing) were different from those identified for all groups of work situations. The ergonomic risk could be considered as serious for the four types of work situation having the highest ergonomic scores (sewing, assembly preparation, pasting, and cutting). CONCLUSION: The results of the health surveillance method depend largely on the definition of the criteria used to define the risk of MSDs. The criteria based on incidence data are more valid than those based on prevalence data. Health and risk factor surveillance must be combined to predict the risk of MSDs in the company. However, exposure assessment plays a greater role in determining the priorities for ergonomic intervention.

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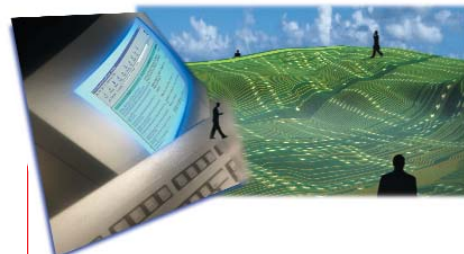
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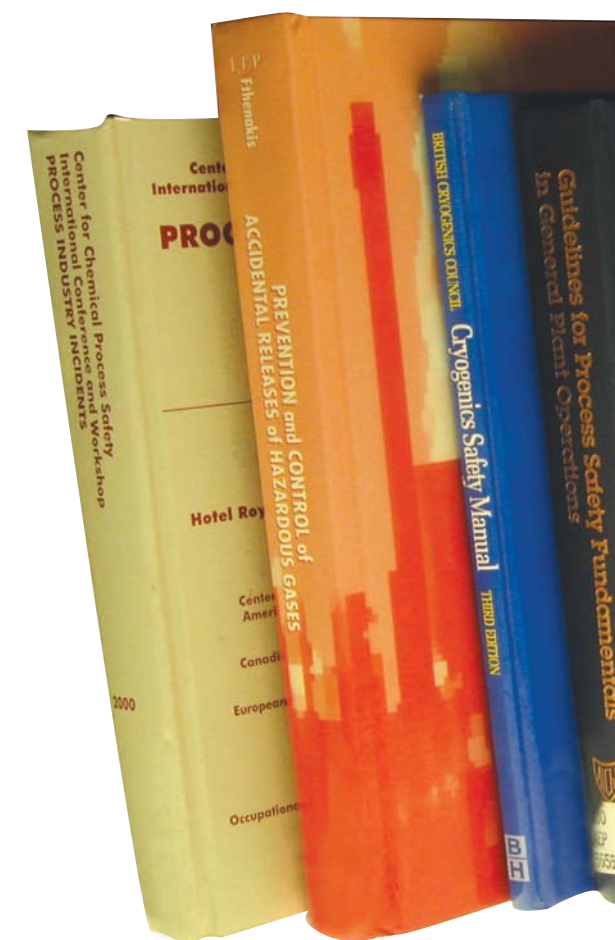
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