

Ergonomic intervention can cut workplace injuries

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7/23/2012



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Each year, thousands of employees are injured on the job costing companies hundreds of thousands of dollars and significant loss of work time. An ergonomics program, provided by a certified athletic trainer can result in key benefits for a company:

- Decreased workers' compensation claims;
- Reduced incidences of fatigue and injury;
- Improved physical health and recovery from stressful job tasks;
- Improved hand-eye coordination for complex work procedures.

Intervention can also train employees on how to limit their exposure to environmental stressors and ultimately provide a positive return on investment for the company.

Ergonomic specialists usually conduct job-site visits to evaluate particular job tasks in order to recommend proper safe work practices, and to encourage the employee, for instance, to conduct correct stretching and lifting procedures designed to prepare them for their work routine. Workers are also trained (often on the job) in recovery from injury and in rehabilitation techniques. These interventions enable employees to return to work as quickly and safely as possible.

Companies with on-staff certified athletic trainers/ ergonomic specialists have noted that these health care professional are a worthy investment. In a 2003 National Athletic Trainers' Association survey of safety managers who employed an on-staff athletic trainer/ergonomics specialist, 100 percent of respondents reported that these specialists provide a favorable return on investment.

James E. Marotz, DO, corporate medical director for Appleton Papers, Appleton, WI, states "Our company has had a certified athletic trainer since 2000 and since that time we have recognized a tremendous upside in the tangible and intangible benefits of this addition including a savings of more than \$245,000 in just 2002 alone in health care costs related to the low back pain, and 62 percent for costs to the upper extremity. Additionally, our 'away from work' has decreased by 60 percent in the last three years...."

Other results from this survey indicated the following;

- 50 percent of companies reported the number of injuries decreased by at least 50 percent;
- 68 percent of the companies indicated the athletic trainer/ergonomics specialist helped decrease restricted work-days and workers' compensation claims for musculoskeletal disorders by more than 25 percent;
- Overall workers' compensation claims also decreased, 75 percent of the companies reported citing OSHA logs, workers' compensation premiums and internal cost analysis;
- 30 percent of companies reported a return of at least \$7 for every \$1 invested;

- Companies that utilize athletic trainers/ergonomic specialists as on-site rehabilitation providers saw a 50 percent reduction in overall health costs.

Ergonomic intervention provided by athletic trainers and other body-mechanic specialists enables manufacturing, industrial and other occupational businesses requiring physical involvement of the employee, to structure their work environment so as to minimize injury, prevent physical stress and accidents, rehabilitate job-related worker issues, and implement suitable work conditions that allow employees to perform optimally on the job.

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