

Tool Box Talk

Ergonomics in Construction

What is Ergonomics?

Ergonomics has to do with designing and arranging workplaces, products and systems to suit the people interacting with them. One of the main goals of ergonomics is to minimize the risk of injury or harm.

Benefits of Ergonomics

There are five proven benefits of having a strong workplace ergonomics process.

Cost Reduction

Musculoskeletal (soft tissue) disorders (MSDs) and injuries are a common and costly category of workplace injuries. Reducing ergonomic risks and indirect costs associated with MSDs is an opportunity for significant cost savings.

Improved Productivity

When a work environment is designed with ergonomic solutions that allow for good posture, less exertion, fewer motions and improved heights and reaches, workplaces become more efficient and productivity improves.

Improved Quality

To produce quality products, it is key to avoid worker frustration and fatigue. If a job is too physically taxing for workers, it may not get done the way it was intended and compromise the quality of the product.

Improved Employee Engagement

Reducing employee fatigue and discomfort on the job can result in a lower rate of turnover and absenteeism. It can also improve morale and employee engagement.

Improved Safety Culture

A company committed to ergonomics also shows that it values the health and safety of its workers. The overarching result of achieving the four prior benefits of ergonomics is improving your company safety culture.

Creating and fostering this safety culture will ultimately lead to better performance of the company as a whole, as individual health and safety is protected.

Preventative Measures

Stretching

- Stretch before you start work and during short breaks (at least once per hour), and after breaks and lunch to avoid fatigue
- Stretch to warm up muscles and increase flexibility/elasticity to improve mental alertness and reduce fatigue, tension and stress. It's also important to stretch if tension or stress is apparent after a lengthy task duration or an extended awkward posture.

Use Mechanical Lift Assists and Carts

- Avoid manually handling objects more than 35 lbs
- Avoid carrying objects more than 100 feet

Practice Proper Cart Handling

- Push instead of pulling. Use both hands when pushing.
- Stand directly behind the cart when pushing (avoid twisting your body)
- Maintain good control and limit speed
- Ensure cart is not overloaded

Use Proper Lifting Techniques when Lifting

- Bend knees and look ahead to keep back straight when lifting a load
- Position the load close to the body and maintain a firm grip
- Use smooth, controlled movements and keep arms in front of body
- Turn feet in the direction of movement to avoid twisting

Reduce Repetition

- Use power tools when available
- Avoid pressure on palms, wrists and elbows
- Change your position or take breaks from repetitive tasks. Follow job rotation policies where applicable to alternate muscle groups between successive tasks.