

LOSS CONTROL TOOL CHEST

Establishing an Ergonomics Program

Ergonomics is the science of fitting workplace conditions and job demands to the capabilities of the working population. NIOSH, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, estimates ergonomic problems affect several millions of workers each year, with costs exceeding \$100 billion annually (approximately \$1 for every \$3 spent on workers compensation).

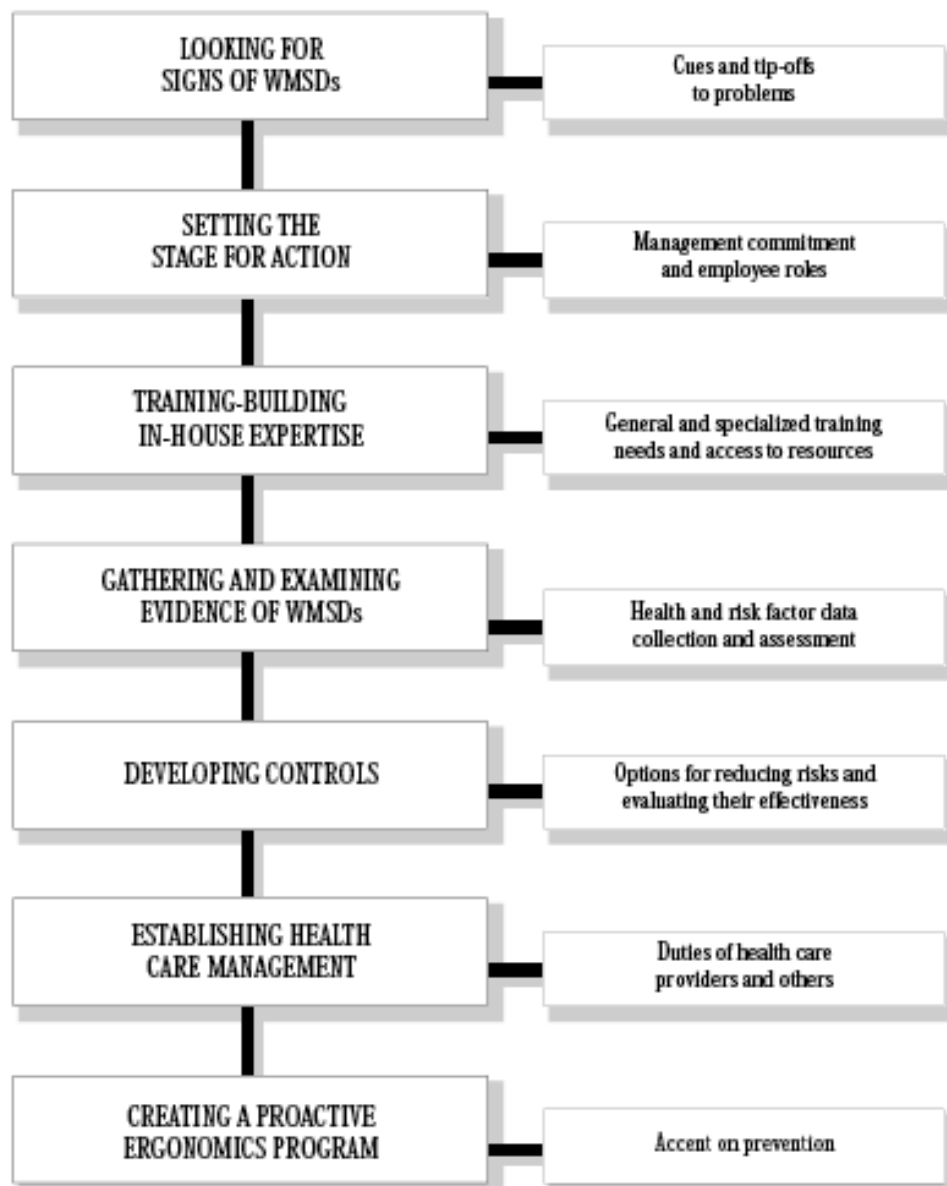
Effective and successful “fits” promote high productivity, reduction of injuries, and increased employee job satisfaction. In order to have an effective ergonomics program, NIOSH suggests 7-steps:

1. Looking for signs of work related musculoskeletal problems in the workplace such as frequent reports of aches and pains, employee turnover, job tasks that require repetitive, forceful exertions, prolonged awkward postures, vibration, etc.
2. Setting the stage for action by showing management commitment to address these problems and encouraging employee involvement.
3. Training – building in-house expertise by training management as well as employees to evaluate potential problems.
4. Gathering and examining evidence of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) to identify jobs that are most problematic by reviewing OSHA logs, workers’ compensation and medical claim records, job analyses, employee surveys, etc.
5. Identifying and developing controls for jobs that pose a risk of injury and evaluating these controls once implemented to determine if they have reduced or eliminated the problem.
6. Health care management to emphasize the importance of early detection and treatment of MSDs to prevent impairment or disability.
7. Proactive ergonomics to minimize risk factors for MSDs when planning new operations or work processes.

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Implementing an ergonomics program has both risks and rewards. The risks come with enhanced communication to the employees because with increased awareness, ergonomic problems tend to get reported so rates appear to rise in the beginning. Ultimately, however, the program helps to promote a safer and healthier work environment, boost productivity, reverse injury rate trends and enhance cooperation and teamwork.

A Pathway to Controlling Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders (WMSDs)



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Cal/OSHA Publications:

Cal/OSHA has a number of ergonomic publications for construction and general industry at the following web-address:

<http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/PubOrder.asp>

Ergonomics – History of the California Standard

<http://www.dir.ca.gov/DOSH/ergohist.htm>

NIOSH: Elements of Ergonomics Programs

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/97-117/pdfs/97-117.pdf>