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## SAFETY WORKPLAN

### 10 Steps to MSD Prevention

**M**usculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) have become a leading source of workers' comp claims for companies and a major source of pain and discomfort for employees.

The basis for controlling MSD hazards is to implement different kinds of ergonomics measures. Ergonomics is a science that focuses on how the body does tasks and the physical impact on the bones, muscles, joints and spine. Ergonomics is about making tasks fit workers rather than the other way around.

**Example:** Constant reaching exerts physical stress on the back and shoulders. So, measures should be taken so that the worker can do the task using his normal posture without having to reach, e.g., by moving the work closer to him or giving him tools that extend his reach.

#### What's at Stake

Ergonomic injuries affect millions of workers each year and are a main factor in workplace injuries, employee absences, and overall job satisfaction. The cost to employers is more than \$20 billion a year. **That's not a typo - \$20 billion a year.** These costs include worker compensation costs and medical expenses. Here's a 10-step workplan to help you manage MSD triggers and reduce the risk of ergonomic injuries.

#### 10 Steps to Take

##### Step 1: Create an MSD Hazard Assessment Team

Hazard assessment should be led by somebody with experience and training in MSDs and legal requirements.

Others who should be part of the hazard assessment team include:

- Representatives of departments and operations that may have MSD problems
- Supervisors of high risk operations or activities
- Safety committee members
- Workers familiar with the assessed operations and/or who've experienced MSD symptoms

**Read More on Page 2** ▶

If nobody at your company is qualified, you should consider bringing in an outside consultant.

## Step 2: Identify MSD Triggers and Risk Areas

Next, identify MSD hazards in your workplace. The key is to not try and cover everything but focus on jobs, operations, and departments that pose the greatest risks of MSDs.

Methods to identify high-risk areas and triggers include:

- Direct observation of how jobs are done by one or more knowledgeable individuals
- Reviewing records that may reveal patterns or trends in ergonomic injuries. Records include:
  - Injury logs and summaries
  - Workers' complaints of MSD symptoms or signs
  - Accident reports including results of internal investigations
  - Workers' compensation claims
  - Workplace audit results
- Recommendations and findings of outside consultants
- Interviewing and surveying workers and supervisors.

## Did You Know?

- Musculoskeletal disorders account for nearly 70 million physician office visits in the United States annually, and an estimated 130 million total health care encounters including outpatient, hospital, and emergency room visits.
- The Institute in Medicine estimates the economic burden of WMSDs as measured by compensation costs, lost wages, and lost productivity, are between \$45 and \$54 billion annually.
- According to Liberty Mutual, the largest workers' compensation insurance provider in the United States, overexertion injuries—lifting, pushing, pulling, holding, carrying or throwing an object— cost employers \$13.4 billion every year.

## TOOL

Use the Lifting Hazard Assessment Checklist on page 4 to carry out your own ergonomic assessment for workers involved in materials handling work.

## Step 3: Address the Right MSD Risk Factors

MSD hazard assessment isn't one but a series of assessments, each of which focuses on a different set of MSD triggers, including:

- The physical environment in which work is done, e.g., architectural, design, and work space layout, configuration of work stations, and even environmental factors like temperature.
- Job-specific risk factors associated with certain tasks such as:
  - Those involving lifting of heavy or bulky objects
  - Twisting or bending
  - Tight gripping, contact stress, awkward postures
  - Continuous repetition and/or exposure to vibration or cold temperatures
- Individual risk factors of workers, including:
  - Age, sex, weight
  - Physical condition

## Step 4: Assess Severity of Hazards You Identify

Most organizations don't have the resources to eliminate all MSD hazards from their workplaces. So, organizations must decide what, if anything, to do to control the hazards they find. Hazard assessment enables organizations to make these tough decisions by prioritizing hazards according to the degree of risk they pose. To do this evaluation, rank hazards by:

- Severity, intensity, duration and frequency of exposure
- Correctability
  - The complexity of the hazard's cause(s)
  - Whether technology and other solutions are available
  - Cost and feasibility to implement.

## Step 5: Select Appropriate Engineering Controls

As with other hazards, the preferred approach is using engineering controls to eliminate or reduce MSD hazards. Such controls may include:

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- Mechanical measures that eliminate high MSD risk jobs, like use of mechanical devices for lifting or moving heavy objects (and patients in healthcare settings).
- Adjusting chairs, work benches and other furnishings so the workspace fits the worker.
- Use of ergonomically designed tools, such as low vibration jackhammers or hand tools with handles that require less force to grip.
- Ergonomically designed computer work stations.

#### Step 6: Implement Work/Administrative Controls

The next layer of prevention is the use of work or administrative controls, which affect how the work is actually carried out, including:

- Safe work procedures for jobs involving high MSD risk.
- Rotating workers in and out of high-risk tasks so exposure isn't continuous.
- Giving workers regular breaks to recover.

#### Step 7: Provide PPE & Other Protective Equipment

Appropriate PPE for MSD hazards may include:

- Gloves to protect hands from injury, vibration, or cold.
- Anti-fatigue mats to reduce musculoskeletal strain and fatigue that comes from standing or walking on hard surfaces for long periods.
- Footwear with anti-fatigue insoles, a kind of anti-fatigue mat that's inserted into the shoe, especially useful when working on hard surfaces that can't be covered with mats.
- Knee and elbow pads to minimize the stress and fatigue generated by contact with hard or sharp surfaces.
- Wrist splints and braces to limit arm and wrist movements that can cause or aggravate an injury.
- Wrist rests on computer keyboards and office workstations.

#### Step 8: Notify & Educate Workers about MSD Hazards

Workers exposed to MSD risks need the appropriate safety information and education about:

- The specific MSD risks they face on their job.
- What controls are in place to protect them from those hazards.
- How to recognize MSD signs and symptoms.
- What to do if they experience those signs and symptoms.

#### Step 9: Investigate Reported MSD Injuries

You also need to establish a clear procedure that workers can use to report MSDs and then be sure you follow up and investigate these reports.

## TOOL

Use the Business Case for Safety on page 7 to help employees resonate with the real-world impact of MSD on the lives of people just like them.

#### Step 10: Review Your MSD Prevention Measures

The final phase of MSD prevention is program review. Look for:

- How corrective measures you put in place are working and what, if any, changes need to be made.
- New hazards you didn't find or weren't present during the original hazard assessment and what's required to correct these hazards.

You should conduct a regular program review at least once a year and in response to triggering events like:

- A rash of MSD symptoms or worker complaints.
- Relocation of MSD-sensitive operations to different locations.
- Other significant changes to MSD-sensitive operations or personnel. ❖

## FATALITY REPORT

### Five Killed in Workplace Shooting

John Robert Neumann Jr., was fired in April from his job at a factory that manufactures awnings and accessories for recreational vehicles. He returned to the isolated industrial area on a Monday morning in June, authorities said, armed with a semi-automatic handgun and a hunting knife.

According to authorities, Neumann got in through a rear door of the building, apparently looking for specific company employees. He at one point encountered a woman, pointed a gun at her and told her to get out of the building. Then he allegedly singled out other employees, shooting and killing five former colleagues. He stopped at least once to reload. Neumann shot and killed himself before authorities arrived.

#### Final Word

Workplace violence isn't something that only happens to other people or at other companies. It can and does happen with seemingly increased frequency. Employers must have a plan for recognizing the signs of potentially violent people, methods for preventing or pre-empting violence at work as early as possible. Finally, employers must have a plan in place for responding to violent workplace events like the one above.

**POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

**Lifting Hazard Assessment Checklist**

Adapt this checklist based on your company's safety program and work environment.

| GENERAL   | YES | NO | CORECTIVE ACTION NEEDED | DATE |
|---|-----|----|-------------------------|------|
| Does the load handled exceed 23 kg/50lb.?   |     |    |                         |      |
| Is the object difficult to bring close to the body because of its size, bulk or shape?  |     |    |                         |      |
| Is the load hard to handle because it lacks handles or cutouts for handles, or has slippery surfaces or sharp edges?                    |     |    |                         |      |
| Is the footing unsafe, i.e., are the floors slippery, inclined or uneven?   |     |    |                         |      |
| Does the task require fast movement, such as throwing, swinging or rapid walking?   |     |    |                         |      |
| Does the task require stressful body postures, such as stooping to the floor, twisting, reaching overhead or excessive lateral bending? |     |    |                         |      |
| Is most of the load handled by only one hand, arm or shoulder?  |     |    |                         |      |
| Does the task require working in extreme temperatures or with noise, vibration, poor lighting or airborne contaminants?                 |     |    |                         |      |
| Does the task require working in a confined area?   |     |    |                         |      |
| SPECIFIC  | YES | NO | CORECTIVE ACTION NEEDED | DATE |
| Does lifting frequency exceed 5 lifts per minute?   |     |    |                         |      |
| Does the vertical lifting distance exceed 1 metre/3 feet?   |     |    |                         |      |
| Do carries last longer than 1 minute?   |     |    |                         |      |
| Do tasks that require large sustained pushing or pulling forces exceed 30 seconds duration?   |     |    |                         |      |
| Do extended reach static holding tasks exceed 1 minute?   |     |    |                         |      |

## How to Reduce Your Risk of Ergonomic Injuries

### WHAT'S AT STAKE?

One size does not fit all when it comes to work equipment. Whenever a worker must modify or adjust herself to perform a work task, the mismatch between the worker and the task causes stress and strain on her body.

If the task needs to be performed only occasionally, it doesn't typically become a problem. But the strain of performing a task repetitively during one shift or over a period of days, weeks, months and sometimes years can cause chronic ergonomic-related injuries and illnesses that become serious, requiring time off work or surgery.

### WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Injuries and illnesses that result from ergonomic problems include musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), cumulative trauma disorders (CTDs) or repetitive stress injuries (RSIs). Here are some of the common diagnoses:

- Muscle strains and tears
- Joint or tendon inflammation
- Pinched nerves
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Trigger finger
- Tendonitis
- Rotator cuff syndrome
- Hand-arm vibration syndrome
- Low back pain
- Herniated spinal disk
- Sciatica

### HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

To reduce your risk of incurring an ergonomic-related injury, it's important to ensure the work task fits you, not the other way around. Here are some ways you can do that:

**Adjust your workstation:** Consider raising or lowering a chair, changing the level of your work bench or

obtaining a platform to stand on. Adjusting the angle of a drafting board or repositioning a computer screen can greatly improve comfort and performance. You can also rearrange lighting to see your work without having to lean forward.

**Adapt your tools:** Adding longer, padded or angled handles to tools can lessen repetitive strain. Use tools designed to keep your hands, arms and back in a comfortable, natural position while you are working. And avoid handles that cut into the hand.

**Arrange your work:** Place work materials where you can reach them without excessive stretching, twisting or bending. Avoid arrangements where you must lean forward and reach at an angle. Store materials on a shelf rather than on the floor to minimize lifting.

**Take a break:** Organize your work to allow you to switch from one task to another. This will help avoid back strain and repetitive strain. Take advantage of scheduled breaks to stretch and move around.

**Be aware:** Pay attention to how you feel while you're working. Adjust your work area to prevent muscle strain.

**Know the signs:** Symptoms of ergonomic-related injuries often begin as minor complaints of discomfort, stiffness or aches that disappear when you go home at the end of your shift. However, if you continue to perform the same task the same way, the body's ability to recover decreases and eventually the discomfort turns into a more serious condition. That's why it's important to recognize the early symptoms of a problem and alert your supervisor before a more serious injury occurs. Some of these symptoms can be:

- Painful joints

- Pain, tingling or numbness in hands or feet
- Pain in the wrists, shoulders, forearms or knees
- Back or neck pain
- Swelling or inflammation
- Shooting or stabbing pains in the arms or legs
- Fingers or toes turning white

### FINAL WORD

*Nobody knows your job like you do, so speak up if you have an idea on how your work or workstation could be made better from an ergonomic point of view. ❖*

**Meeting material to go:** Safety meeting materials such as presentation tips, PowerPoint presentations, quiz answers and more are downloadable at: [www.SafetySmart.com](http://www.SafetySmart.com)

## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. To reduce your risk of incurring an ergonomic-related injury, you must ensure that the work task:
  - a. Is done by someone else
  - b. Fits you, not the other way around
  - c. Is performed quickly
2. Sometimes you can greatly improve performance and comfort by simply raising or lowering your chair.
 

True  False
3. What can you do during your scheduled breaks to help reduce your risk of an ergonomic-related injury?
  - a. Take a nap
  - b. Skip the break and keep working to keep your muscles warmed up
  - c. Stretch and move around
4. If you continue to perform the same task the same way, the body's ability to recover increases as your muscles adapt and grow stronger.
 

True  False



## BUSINESS CASE FOR SAFETY

# Use Victim Accounts to Humanize Need for MSD Prevention

**A**cross North America, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs):

- Have the highest lost-time claim costs of any injury;
- Lead all injuries in number of lost-time work days; and
- Account for between 20¢ and 60¢ of every \$1.00 of total workers' comp claims.

### Yeah, But Can You Name Them?

You're a safety coordinator trying to build a business case for MSD prevention. The problem is that they're just that—statistics. Numbers can never do justice to the human costs of work injuries. And while that's true of all injuries, the coldness of the numbers really comes into play when you're dealing with a nonfatal hazard like MSDs.

After all, MSDs don't actually kill people. All they do is inflict career- and life-destroying pain and misery that makes victims wish they were dead. So while you'll need the metrics to document ROI, you can add human emotion to your business case for MSD prevention investment by recounting the stories of real-life victims.

Better yet, you can let the victims tell their own stories in their own words. Here are 3 such personal victim accounts to get you started. You may also want to share these accounts with your supervisors so that they can use them to humanize their ergonomics training and demonstrate to workers that MSDs are flesh-and-blood real.

#### MEET: PHIL RITTER

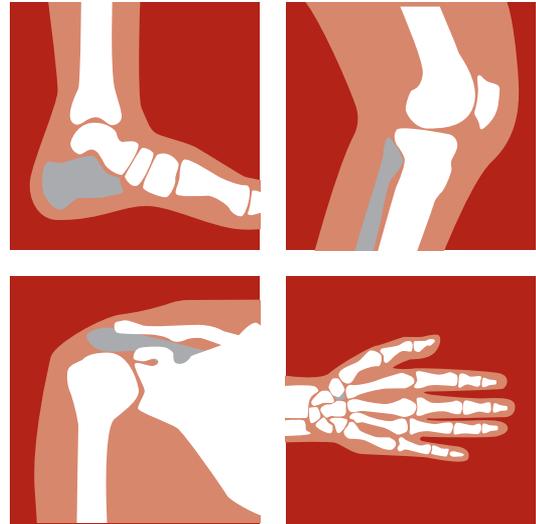
"My name is Phil Ritter. My story begins when I was a 26-year-old site coordinator at a construction site where I often operated jackhammers.

One day, I noticed a tingling at the very tip of my fingers like the stabbing of needles. The pain grew worse and worse. I couldn't sleep, hold a newspaper or a fork. I had to drive my truck open handed to get a grip on the wheel. I was taking 22 aspirin a day.

I was diagnosed with RSI (repetitive stress injury) and carpal tunnel syndrome. I had to have surgery. It was a long recovery. I couldn't even put my socks on for the first 3 weeks.

But I turned out to be luckier than most. Six months later, I went back to work and learned how to protect myself from MSDs. I learned to relax the hands so as not to grip the tools too hard, to protect myself from vibration, and so on.

And I learned something else. There is a safe way. Victims of MSDs are too often told that it's all in their mind. This is not true. My advice to the workers out there is to learn the safe way and to ask somebody if they're not sure."



#### MEET: JAMES POWELL

"My name is James Powell. I am 60 years old. I am married to Connie and we have 2 grown children, Cynthia and Catherine.

I have worked at Safeway since 1971. I was a meat cutter. As meat cutters, we work in very cold temperatures and there is a great deal of stress on the shoulder from lifting and cutting meat. My shoulder had been bothering me for some time. When I could no longer lift my right arm without the help of my other arm, I went to the doctor. An MRI showed a tear in my rotator cuff.

I have had 3 surgeries and I am still unable to return to my position at Safeway. I now need another surgery. I have lost my job. I have fallen way behind on our bills. My daughter has taken on the responsibility of paying our bills. She has had to take on a second job. I am no longer able to fish like I used to."

#### MEET: GARY WOODFORD

"My name is Gary Woodford. I'm 49. I worked for 26 years for C&S Propellers assembling and installing propellers on military and civilian aircraft. My job required me to lift propeller assemblies that weighed over 100 pounds.

One day, I was lifting a propeller assembly dome, weighing 150 pounds, for a C 130 military plane into place so I could install it. I felt a sharp pain in my back and had to stop. I called my co-worker for help. I had injured 2 discs, which were pressing on my spinal cord.

My life hasn't been the same since. I can't hike, camp, run or do anything active."

**Access more profiles on [SafeSupervisor.com](http://SafeSupervisor.com) that you can use to illustrate the real world impact of MSDs to your employees. ❖**

## SHOP TALK

## 9 Common Pitfalls to Avoid when Investigating Workplace Violence Incidents

### Trap #1: Waiting Too Long to Investigate

Investigations must be conducted promptly. Waiting to investigate could allow for a more serious and dangerous situation to develop.

Keep in mind that although speed is important, it isn't the paramount concern. Fairness is. Rushing an investigation is just as bad as dragging your feet.

### Trap #2: Relying on a Biased or Incompetent Investigator

The person carrying out the investigation must be completely impartial and not related to or in any other special relationship with either the accuser or accused. For example, supervisors shouldn't investigate subordinates and vice versa. Individuals also shouldn't investigate if they have a history of conflict with the accused or the accuser. In addition, the person who investigates the complaint must have the necessary competency, skills and disposition:

- Is impartial and is seen by the parties to be impartial;
- Has knowledge, training and experience in issues relating to workplace violence; and
- Has knowledge of relevant legislation.

### Trap #3: Not Getting Both Sides of the Story

Some companies make the mistake of talking only to the alleged victim. An investigation is only fair if you also give the accused an opportunity to defend himself. You must also give the accused enough facts about the allegations, including dates and specific details, to enable him to respond.

### Trap #4: Not Interviewing Third Parties

It's important to interview not only the accuser and accused but also anyone else who may have relevant information about the situation, especially eyewitnesses. Document the results of these interviews and, when appropriate, get written statements from third party witnesses.

### Trap #5: Failing to Gather All Relevant Information

The investigation must be thorough and earnest. You can't simply go through the motions. The goal of the investigation should be to gather all relevant information so that appropriate decisions can be made. An inadequate, superficial investigation is likely to lead to liability.

### Trap #6: Asking "Leading" Questions

One common interview mistake to avoid is asking leading questions—that is, phrasing questions in a manner that suggests the "correct" answer to the person being questioned:

*Wrong:* "Did Joe's conduct make you feel scared and afraid for your safety?"

*Right:* "How did Joe's conduct make you feel?"

### Trap #7: Interviewing Witnesses in the Presence of Each Other

Interviewing the accuser in front of the accused can intimidate the accuser. Even third-party witnesses can be influenced by the presence or statements of others. So, witnesses should be interviewed separately and not in the presence of other witnesses. Doing so minimizes not only the risk of intimidation but also false testimony.

### Trap #8: Not Following Company Policy and Procedure

A sure-fire way to taint an investigation is to deviate from your company's investigation policies and procedures. Stick to company policy as much as possible. However, you can follow different investigation procedures if you have a solid justification for doing so.

### Trap #9: Not Documenting Investigation

It's important not only to conduct an investigation properly but also to thoroughly document the investigation's various steps. Without such a paper trail, it's extremely difficult to retrace your steps and prove that the investigation was properly conducted. ❖

## SPOT THE SAFETY VIOLATION

### The Forgotten



If this photo had been taken after June of 2013 or sometime before June of 2014, there wouldn't be an issue with this fire extinguisher. However, it was taken recently and is well past time for an inspection.

While the extinguisher may work, as it says on the inspection tag, "Void 1 year from Mo. Punched." At a

minimum, fire extinguishers must be visually inspected monthly, with a maintenance check done annually. Rechargeable fire extinguishers require more in-depth inspections every six years. This involves conducting a hydrostatic test, which requires the fire extinguishers to be emptied, placed under water and subjected to pressures exceeding their ratings. ❖