Establishing an Ergonomics Committee

By establishing ergonomics committees, companies increase the in-house knowledge of ergonomics to employees within the individual business units. This allows organizations to address the key drivers to injuries and illnesses as well as impacting workers compensation claims frequency and severity.

FORMING THE COMMITTEES

Five general concepts to consider:

1. Establish in-house direction.

   Companies which rely on consultants to run the ergonomic process are not as successful as those which are directed from in-house resources. In-house direction demonstrates a company's commitment to the overall ergonomic process as well as providing quick response to various needs from the committee(s).

2. Training on team building and ergonomics.

   Each committee should be trained in team dynamics, as this will be a crucial component of a successful team. In addition, all team members should receive advanced training in ergonomics, as members of the workforce will and should be seeking their guidance on everyday ergonomic issues.

3. Keep individual teams small.

   A core group made up of 5-8 members is significantly more manageable than larger groups. A core-team type of approach works well within large companies. Once an area for investigation/possible interventions is identified, the core group should invite a supervisor and several key workers from that slated area to become temporary members of the team. Not only will their experience of the job process prove invaluable to the team, but the increased knowledge can be carried back and applied in the future to their own area. The procedure of naming temporary committee members may be repeated for each new area selected for analysis.

4. Share committee information with the workforce.

   It is recommended that companies share injury and production data with the general workforce. In addition, committee progress and accomplishments should be widely circulated within the workforce. This will demonstrate to the working population that efforts are being taken on their behalf to improve the overall safety and welfare of the employees. It will also prove invaluable with respect to worker buy-in when interventions are being implemented, especially if those interventions involve changing work methods/processes.

5. Implement problem solving decision making techniques.
   There are several widely used problem-solving techniques available to committees. They should include at a minimum the following:
   - Problem Identification
   - Problem Analysis
   - Solution Development
   - Implementation
   - Follow-up

All of the above steps should be conducted utilizing brainstorming techniques and should involve the entire committee.

COMMITTEE SELECTION PROCESS

Volunteers should be solicited for the committee. The best team members are those who are forward-thinking, that is, people who can think outside of the box.

Committees should comprise of an equal number of supervisors (management) and hourly employees. Any imbalance of committee members should be weighted towards the hourly employee. By far the best Ergonomist within an organization is the workforce who performs the job duties. Teams that train the workforce are the most successful.

Look for "hands-on" technicians/engineers who have demonstrated good old Yankee ingenuity within their respective areas.

Prospective Members:

- Health Nurse or other healthcare provider
- Safety specialist
- Engineer with facility background
- Human Resources representative
- Several members from the workforce

COMMITTEE STEPS

1. *Establish roles within the group.*
   Each team member should have a well-defined role and individual responsibility to the committee and overall ergonomic process.

2. *Each committee should contain:*
   A trained facilitator in the problem-solving, decision-making process employed.

3. *A committee chairperson (to be elected).*
   One committee member assigned to take minutes. This position may be rotated as deemed appropriate.

ESTABLISH ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Each committee member should have well-defined responsibilities in the group. All time allotments indicated below will vary by industry and individual project. They do *not* include training in problem-solving and decision-making techniques or in ergonomic training.

Facilitator

(Time allotment 4 hours/month)

- Plan meetings and agenda
- Coordinate/conduct training in problem-solving, decision-making technique to be employed
- Distribute minutes to all team members
- Handle flip-chart duties

Safety Specialist

(Time allotment 12 hours/month)

- Provide injury/illness data to committee
- Submit funding requests (when appropriate)
- Assure that interventions meet current company and OSHA criteria
- Be active committee member, including work-site evaluations
- Be responsible for specific action items

Human Resources Representative

(Time allotment 8 hours/month)

- Coordinate ergonomic training for committee members
- Provide insight to group on all matters related to field of expertise
- Be active committee member including work-site evaluations
- Be responsible for specific action items

Engineer

(Time allotment 10 hours/month)

- Provide engineering analysis of problem area and prospective problems arising from interventions
- Assist in the design of interventions
- Coordinate purchase and installation of equipment (when applicable).
- Oversee specific projects

- Be active committee member including work-site evaluations
- Be responsible for specific action items

Supervisors and other team members

(Time allotment 4 hours/month)

- Provide intervention ideas
- Share committee information with the workforce
- Be active committee member including work-site evaluations
- Be responsible for specific action items
- Help sell new ideas to workforce