



Health & Safety

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OSHA's New Ergonomic Standard

During a time of Congressional recess and a lame-duck President, most were surprised when the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) chose to issue a final ergonomics standard on November 14, 2000. This rule, originally proposed November 1999, is a sweeping regulation that covers all general industry employers (including metal finishing facilities). More than 100 million American workers will be covered by this standard, and OSHA estimates that the new regulations may cost the six million affected employers \$4.5 billion per year.

The standard became effective as of January 15, 2001. All affected companies must comply with the provisions of the new standard no later than October 14, 2001. Initially, the only thing that an employer is required to do is provide basic information to their employees about musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and the new standard. MSDs are injuries and illnesses such as carpal tunnel syndrome, lower back pain, tendinitis, and many more.

The following information can simply be distributed to employees and posted in the workplace to comply with the initial OSHA requirements before October 14, 2001. After this date, if an employee reports an MSD, then an employer must respond in accordance with the new standard. Also, all new employees must receive the following information within 14 days of hiring, in order to comply with the new standard.

What You Need To Know About Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs)

(Excerpts from OSHA 1910.900—Appendix A for employee distribution)

Ergonomics is the science of fitting jobs to the people who work in them. The goal of an ergonomics program is to reduce work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) developed by workers when a major part of their jobs involve reaching, bending over, lifting heavy objects, using continuous force, working with vibrating equipment and doing repetitive motions.

What Are Signs & Symptoms of MSDs that You Should Watch For?

Workers suffering from MSDs may experience less strength for gripping, less range of motion, loss of muscle function and inability to do everyday tasks.

Common symptoms include:

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

What Are MSDs?

MSDs are injuries and illnesses that affect muscles, nerves, tendons, ligaments, joints or spinal discs.

Your doctor might tell you that you have one of the following common MSDs:

- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Rotator cuff syndrome
- De Quervain's disease

- Trigger finger
- Sciatica
- Epicondylitis
- Tendinitis
- Raynaud's phenomenon
- Carpet layers' knee
- Herniated spinal disc
- Low back pain
- Hand-arm vibration syndrome
- Tension neck syndrome

What Causes MSDs?

Workplace MSDs are caused by exposure to the following risk factors:

Repetition. Doing the same motions over and over again places stress on the muscles and tendons.

The severity of risk depends on how often the action is repeated, the speed of the movement, the number of muscles involved and the required force.

Forceful Exertions. Force is the amount of physical effort required to perform a task (such as heavy lifting) or to maintain control of equipment or tools. The amount of force depends on the type of grip, the weight of an object, body posture, the type of activity and the duration of the task.

Awkward Postures. Posture is the position your body is in and affects muscle groups that are involved in physical activity. Awkward postures include repeated or prolonged reaching, twisting, bending, kneeling, squatting, working overhead with your hands or arms, or holding fixed positions.

Contact Stress. Pressing the body against a hard or sharp edge can result in placing too much pressure on nerves, tendons and blood ves-

sels. For example, using the palm of your hand as a hammer can increase your risk of suffering an MSD.

Vibration. Operating vibrating tools such as sanders, grinders, chip-pers, routers, drills and other saws can lead to nerve damage.

What is the OSHA Ergonomics Standard?

OSHA's standard requires employers to respond to employee reports of work-related MSDs or signs and symptoms of MSDs that last seven days after you report them. If your employer determines that your MSD, or MSD signs or symptoms, can be connected to your job, your employer must provide you with an opportunity to contact a health care professional and receive work restrictions, if necessary. Your wages and benefits must be protected for a period of time while on light duty or temporarily off work to recover. Your employer must analyze the job, and if MSD hazards are found, must take steps to reduce those hazards.

Your employer is required to make available a summary of the OSHA ergonomics standard. The full standard can be found on the Internet at <http://www.osha.gov>.

Talk to your supervisor or other responsible persons about your suggestions on how to fix the problem.

Your employer may not discriminate against you for reporting MSDs, MSD signs or symptoms or MSD hazards. Your employer may not have policies that discourage such reporting.

If You Have Symptoms of MSDs

If MSD signs and symptoms are not reported early, permanent disability may result. It is important that you report MSD signs and symptoms right away to avoid long-lasting problems. Your employer is required to respond promptly to those reports. Contact the safety manager at your company to report MSDs, MSD signs or symptoms or MSD hazards. *P&SF*