

# Tips for Effective Ergonomics Training Programs

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## HIGHLIGHTS:

- Senior management and organizational commitment
- Train managers and supervisors to create a responsive environment
- Support active company participation
- Active learning experiences and better retention
- Continuous learning and improvement

Ergonomics training is an important element in effective health and safety programs. When ergonomics training is part of a comprehensive, systematic approach to integrating ergonomics into an organization, it can play a key role in enabling an organization to link corporate goals with ergonomic practices, enhance organizational effectiveness, and facilitate the change process.

Training programs modify how people work together, solve work-related problems, and facilitate ergonomics implementation.

A successful ergonomics training program:

1. Increases the ability for the organization to reduce exposure to work-related risk factors and promotes healthy work practices.
2. Incorporates a participatory approach, in which rank and file employees, managers, designers, health professionals, and others are involved.

Key elements necessary to implement and sustain a successful ergonomics training program are as follows:

## **Commitment by Senior Management and Organizational Readiness**

Senior management must have the vision and commitment to reduce adverse health effects and increase performance through the use of ergonomics. When top decision makers support the mission and purpose of an ergonomics program, an organizational culture and safety climate change can occur. The organization must be ready for the training in order for it to produce results. The training should be introduced by senior management who indicate their support of the training initiative. Without strong management support and commitment the training will not produce the desired outcomes.

## **Create a Responsive Environment: Train Managers and Supervisors**

Training of managers and supervisors is necessary in order to provide a responsive environment in which employees are encouraged to utilize their training through reinforcement and reward. Since supervisors have more influence on the daily performance of individual employees, their participation in the training process is essential for the success of the ergonomic training program. Remember, a participative safety culture is required with supervisor performance expectations clearly stated by senior management once the training has concluded.



## **Support Active Participation**

Active involvement by employees creates a sense of commitment and support for the ergonomic training program goals. Being a member of a team that is designing and implementing an ergonomic training program is beneficial to both the workforce and the organization as a whole. Working together on cross-functional, interdisciplinary teams provides a unique strength in designing and developing a training program.

## **Develop Active Learning Experiences**

Have employees participate in problem-solving activities and group discussions. The use of group exercises and ergonomics-related case studies promotes an active and motivating learning environment. Retention also increases when employees actively participate, either through demonstrations or when they teach what they have learned. Facilitators can encourage participation by bringing “real world” experiences into the training session. Also, if the class consists of individuals from various job positions in the organization, active and interactive discussions can occur which provide an ideal opportunity to discuss “real” problems together.

## **Continuous Learning and Improvement**

Ergonomics training must be adapted to changes that occur in the organization as well as changes in health and safety practices and technology. Financial and organizational resources must be committed to actively support the safety culture change process. This includes the commitment of human resources within the company, such as administrators, trainers and curriculum developers, and media and computer application developers. Continuous improvement is not a short-term activity. Rather it requires long-term management commitment to continuously adapt and improve the program.

## **Observe and Reinforce the Training**

The training agenda should include types of disorders, job related occupational risk factors, ergonomic solutions, and how to deal with resistance and manage conflict. Employees will appreciate ergonomic solutions involving their workstation and their jobs when they understand why changes proposed changes will help them. The facilitator should be viewed as a “coach” and not as someone trying to enforce company policy. As a coach, the ergonomic assessor is there to advise the employee on how to perform his or her own workstation adjustments.

## **Provide Continuous Feedback**

Performance improves more quickly when people are given feedback concerning their successes (or lack of them). It is vital that timely feedback is given to all workers and managers about the results and effects of the office ergonomic training program.

Feedback provides information that helps accomplish two performance improvement goals:

1. Improve the program and identify necessary corrective actions, and
2. Reinforce the positive outcomes and benefits of using ergonomics skills in workplace.

## **Tips for Effective Ergonomics Training Programs**

In summary, consider the following tips for effective ergonomics training programs:

- Set objectives to reflect what you want to get out of your ergonomic training program. Don't just start training.
- Establish methods that will measure your effectiveness in meeting those objectives.
- Make your training relevant. Use actual examples from your operation to illustrate ergonomic principles. When possible, use videotape or allow trainees to observe problematic tasks.
- Involve and train your line management, especially your supervisors, in planning, carrying out, and reinforcing the training.
- Don't rely solely on a videotape to do the training for you. Audiovisual materials serve to support your training, not to replace it.
- Follow-up, follow-up, follow-up! One-shot training is rarely successful. Schedule frequent refresher courses. Employees can be helpful in designing effective refreshers; get their input.
- Reinforce the positive. Provide rewards or incentives when supervisors and employees apply the training lessons to their jobs.

- Listen to feedback from employees on existing risk factors, and on how to ergonomically improve their jobs. Make the employees a part of the control plan.
- Outside training consultants may be helpful to supplement your own expertise, but don't rely on them to run your entire program. Management retains the ultimate responsibility for safety at your facility.
- Stress off-the-job as well as worksite ergonomics. Emphasize the importance of ergonomic layouts in the home, especially when using computers.
- Remind employees that overall fitness, diet and nutrition, and other lifestyle considerations are also important.

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