TVS-AIHA December 2008 Website Article
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Simple Solutions: Ergonomics For Construction Workers

When thinking about what to write about for my December article, I was stumped. So I decided to basically provide a review /abstract about a resource that I just discovered. Some of you may already know about this booklet (since it was published in 2007) but it was a new find for me. It is also a topic that is very near and dear to my heart: Ergonomics. It seems to me that we focus so much of our ergonomic attention on computer ergonomics that sometimes we forget about the industrial ergonomics. In my work, I see so many construction workers who perform very hazardous work in very difficult and tight places…not to mention that their work area is radioactively contaminated, dimly lit, wet, and really dirty so the workers have to be in layers of personal protective equipment including respiratory protection. Their task??? To simply cut a duct which runs over and around a large piece of equipment that they can't get reach without crawling or climbing over? Oh and all this takes place greater than six feet off the ground so they have to be in fall protection also while holding a sawsall. Ergonomically – a challenge. The average age of the construction workers that I work with averages around 40-45. Anyway, point is, next time you go out and watch some of the ironworkers, electricians, pipefitters, etc. in your work location, watch out for their body mechanics. Hopefully, the ideas and solutions in this booklet can help reduce the amount of physical stressors that a worker has to endure just to do a day's work. The title of the booklet is ***Simple Solutions: Ergonomics For Construction Workers***, NIOSH 2007 Aug: 1-88

Did You Know...?

1. Construction is one of the most hazardous industries in the United States.

2. The number of back injuries in U.S. construction was 50% higher than the average for all other U.S. industries in 1999 (CPWR, 2002).

3. Backaches and pain in the shoulders, neck, arms, and hands were the most common symptoms reported by construction workers in one study (Cook et al, 1996).

4. Material handling incidents account for 32% of workers' compensation claims in construction, and 25% of the cost of all claims. The average cost per claim is $9,240 (CNA, 2000).

5. Musculoskeletal injuries can cause temporary or even permanent disability, which can affect the worker's earnings and the contractor's profits.

Simple Solutions: Ergonomics For Construction Workers is intended for construction workers, unions, supervisors, contractors, safety specialists, human resources managers - anyone with an interest in safe construction sites. Some of the most common injuries in construction are the result of job demands that push the human body beyond its natural limits. Workers who must often lift, stoop, kneel, twist, grip, stretch, reach overhead, or work in other awkward positions to do a job are at risk of developing a work-related musculoskeletal disorder (WMSD). These can include back problems, carpal tunnel syndrome, tendinitis, rotator cuff tears, sprains, and strains. To aid in the prevention of these injuries, this booklet suggests many simple and inexpensive ways to make construction tasks easier, more comfortable, and better suited to the needs of the human body.

The "Tip Sheets" in this booklet show how using different tools or equipment may reduce the risk of injury. All of the items described in this booklet have been used on working construction sites. Given the nature of construction, some solutions in the booklet may not be appropriate for all worksites. Sometimes solutions discovered for one trade can be modified for other trades. This booklet provides general information regarding the methods some construction contractors have used to reduce workers' exposures to risk factors for work-related musculoskeletal disorders. The use of the tools and equipment described in the booklet does not ensure that a musculoskeletal disorder will not occur. The information contained in this booklet does not produce new obligations or establish any specific standards or guidelines. (*Abstract taken from NIOSH website*)

All this research and information compiled in one place and the price is definitely right….it's free from the NIOSH website. Check it out at http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2007-122/