Workplace Ergonomics Program Field Guide

A practical process for finding and fixing the tasks that wear on your people. The goal is to control injury risk by changing the work, not by asking workers to work differently.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Work through the five steps with the people who actually do the job. When you find a task worth fixing, use the table on page two to match it with controls that fit.

Ergonomics at a Glance

What it is

The science and practice of designing equipment, tools, processes, and the work environment to fit the capabilities of workers.

Why it matters

1 in 3

Roughly one-third of serious workplace injuries can be prevented with ergonomic solutions, and they drive a large share of workers' comp costs.

What you gain

- Fewer injuries and lower workers' comp costs
- Better productivity and quality
- Higher job satisfaction and retention

The 5-Step Process

Whether you have a mature program or just want to make one or two tasks safer, following a process leads to more efficient, cost-effective solutions.

1 Involve employees at every step

They are the experts in their work. They are often best at spotting problems, and they usually have good ideas for fixing them.

2 Identify tasks with risk factors

Walk the floor, ideally with someone unfamiliar with the tasks who can see the work with fresh eyes. Do you see:

	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Manual lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, or other physically demanding work	☐	☐	☐
Hand and arm intensive work, like using tools, assembling parts, or packing boxes	☐	☐	☐
Work done in awkward or static postures, like bending, reaching, or twisting	☐	☐	☐
Injury trends in OSHA 300 Logs or workers' comp claims tied to musculoskeletal disorders	☐	☐	☐

3 Evaluate task risk factors

Often the risk is obvious and a fix can go in with little evaluation. When it is not, consult an ergonomist or a trained safety and health professional.

4 Control risk factors

Match each task to practical controls. The table on page two lists common tasks, their risk factors, and fixes that work.

5 Check for success

After a few weeks in place, confirm the solution is working as planned. Some fixes need a small adjustment to reach full effect.

Provided for educational purposes. This guide is not an ergonomic evaluation, legal advice, or a determination of your obligations. Risk factors and appropriate controls vary by task, facility, and workforce.

Where Ergonomics Risk Shows Up

Match the tasks you found in step two to the risk factors behind them, then pick the controls that fit your operation.

Tasks, Risk Factors, and Controls

TASK	RISK FACTORS	CONTROLS
Lifting and lowering	High forces, bending, reaching, twisting	Reduce load weight, use lift assist equipment, raise or lower work heights, store items between mid-thigh and mid-torso height
Carrying	High forces, gripping, travel distances	Reduce load size and weight, use carts and dollies, improve handles and grips, shorten distances
Pushing and pulling	High forces, bending, reaching, twisting	Use powered carts, maintain wheels and floors, reduce load weight, keep handles at about elbow height
Hand intensive work	High forces, awkward and static postures, hand-arm vibration, repetitive motion	Use and maintain ergonomic hand and power tools, choose lower vibration tools, add adjustable or tilted work surfaces and fixtures or jigs, move tools and parts closer
Work too high, too low, or too far away	Bending, forward reaching, reaching overhead or below the knees, kneeling, squatting	Lower the work, or safely raise the worker with ladders or platforms. Raise the work, or lower the worker with stools or kneeling pads. Bring the work closer by repositioning parts and tools or tilting work surfaces, or bring the worker closer with workstation cutouts.

Your employees are the experts in their work. Ask them first and listen to how they answer.

- ☐ Which part of this job is hardest on your body?
- ☐ Where do you have to bend, reach, or twist?
- ☐ Which tool or part do you fight with most?
- ☐ If you could change one thing here, what would it be?

Prioritizing what you found

Quick wins

STEPS 2 AND 4

Obvious risk with a simple fix. Adjust a work height, add a cart, or move parts closer.

Needs a closer look

STEP 3

Risk that is not clear-cut or a costly fix. Bring in an ergonomist or trained safety professional.

Follow up

STEP 5

Check each solution after a few weeks. Adjust anything not working as planned.

Where CMI Can Help

If this guide turned up tasks worth a closer look, those are the kinds of things we help organizations with: ergonomic task evaluations, practical control recommendations, and programs that keep employees involved. For over 30 years, organizations of all sizes have retained CMI for Environmental, Health, and Safety support.

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