

## Will the new ergonomics standard effect your business?

Carpal tunnel syndrome. Sciatica. Tendinitis. Synovitis. These are some of the musculoskeletal disorders that the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates caused 647,000 lost workdays and \$20 billion in direct costs for workers' compensation during 1996. To reduce the occurrence and cost of these disorders, OSHA intends to issue a standard governing ergonomics. Along those lines, OSHA has issued a draft proposed standard. The elements of this draft are discussed below.

The draft ergonomics standard applies to workplaces having:

**manufacturing operations** - those jobs performed in manufacturing industries in which production work is a significant part of the job duties; or

**manual handling operations** - jobs in which a significant part of the job duties involve lifting/lowering, pushing/pulling, or carrying, and also involves exertion of considerable force because the load or cumulative loads is heavy; or

jobs where a recordable **work-related musculoskeletal disorder (WMSD)** is reported which is recordable in OSHA logs; where WMSD hazards are present and likely to contribute to the WMSD, and where exposure to these hazards are a significant part of the job duties.

Draft Standard § 1910.500.

If your workplace includes any of these types of jobs, the draft standard requires you to establish an ergonomics program specific to the WMSDs and WMSD hazards in your workplace. This program must include the jobs listed above but may also be implemented throughout the workplace.

### Ergonomics Program

The Ergonomics Program must include the following six (6) elements:

**Management Leadership and Employee Participation.** This element requires that employees have ways to report problems, receive responses, and participate in the program. The responsibility for establishing and managing the program must be assigned to at least one (1) person. Additionally, someone and at least one person should be designated to receive and respond to reports of signs and symptoms of WMSDs, hazards, and recommendations.

**Hazard Identification and Information.** This element requires that WMSDs and WMSD hazards must be identified and information about WMSDs and hazards be provided to all employees in those jobs. Identification of WMSDs and hazards can be accomplished by providing a mechanism for employees to report WMSDs and hazards and by reviewing safety and health records. Information about recognizing WMSDs signs and symptoms must be provided to current and new employees. This information must be provided in a way that employees are able to understand.

**Job Hazard Analysis and Control.** This element requires that problem jobs, defined as those jobs in which a WMSD exists or is reported in a manufacturing or manual handling job, must be analyzed. This involves questioning employees about signs or symptoms of WMSDs and the work activities associated with these signs and symptoms. The analysis should cover physical demands of the job, workstation layout and space, equipment used and objects handled, environmental conditions, and work organization. If WMSD hazards exist, measures must be evaluated and implemented to eliminate or control the hazard to the extent feasible. The preferred control measure under the draft standard is engineering control. However, such controls may also include work practices and administrative controls. Interim controls may include personal protective equipment.

**Training.** This element requires training regarding program as well as the specific hazards in the workplace. This training must be provided periodically and no less frequently than every three (3) years. Training must be given to employees in problem jobs and similar jobs, their supervisors, and persons involved in establishing and managing the ergonomics program. This training may be conducted in-house or outsourced.

**Medical Management.** This element requires that prompt and effective medical management, including recommended work restrictions, must be made available at no cost to the employees. Such work restrictions must be maintained up to six (6) months. The draft standard proposes offset in the event workers compensation benefits are obtained.

**Program Evaluation.** Finally, the program's compliance with the standard must be evaluated at least every (3) years. Such an evaluation must include monitoring activities to ensure that the program is functioning and the establishment of baseline measurements as a starting point the gauge the effectiveness of the program. The employer must also ensure that deficiencies are corrected promptly.

At this time, this standard is in draft form and has not yet been published as a proposed standard. Therefore, the items above are something of a moving target. However, employers with employees who have reported a WMSD or where a WMSD hazard exists should review this draft standard and begin to plan its strategy for establishing and implementing its ergonomics program. Additionally, employers should prepare to comment on the proposed standard when it is published in the Federal Register.

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