

PREVENTION

Follow through with training after purchasing new ergo equipment

By Joshua Clifton

Outfitting a workplace with new ergonomic office equipment can be a costly venture. A complete ergonomic workstation can cost a company as much as \$7,000 per employee. If employers want to get the most value for their dollar, one expert advises that it is essential to provide comprehensive training on proper use.

“The time spent training employees on how to use the new equipment is just as important as the amount of time you spent researching what you purchased,” said **Wendy Young**, president and founder of **ErgoPro** in Bellaire, Texas.

Young, who has helped develop ergonomic programs for **BP Amoco**, **Shell** and **Exxon**, said that employers faced with an increasing number of musculoskeletal disorders are often looking for a quick solution. If money is no object, the company will turn to ergonomic office equipment to solve its problem. However, simply purchasing new desks, chairs and monitor stands will not get the job done.

“It is very important to explain to employees why you are doing what you are doing,” Young said. “You can’t just set up their equipment and let them go. They must learn how to feel everything in their own bodies. They need to know when an adjustment needs to be made and when something doesn’t feel right.”

Education and evaluation

Young outlined four strategies employers can use to provide the proper training on using new office equipment. They are:

1. Host a class for all employees. Young said the best way to provide training after making new equipment purchases is to set up a class for all employees to attend. The training, which should be mandatory for all workers who

will be using the equipment, can be held several times over the course of a week, so that everyone can attend.

Young recommends setting up a model workstation. This will allow you to illustrate how to properly use all of the new equipment. “Invite each employee to sit at the model workstation,” she said. “Go through all the basic adjustments that they’ll need to perform, such as changes to the height of their desk and chair, and the placement of the monitor and mouse.”

What kind of information should you cover in a training class? Young recommends the following:

- **Chair and desk adjustment.** Provide employees with information on how to properly adjust a chair and desk.

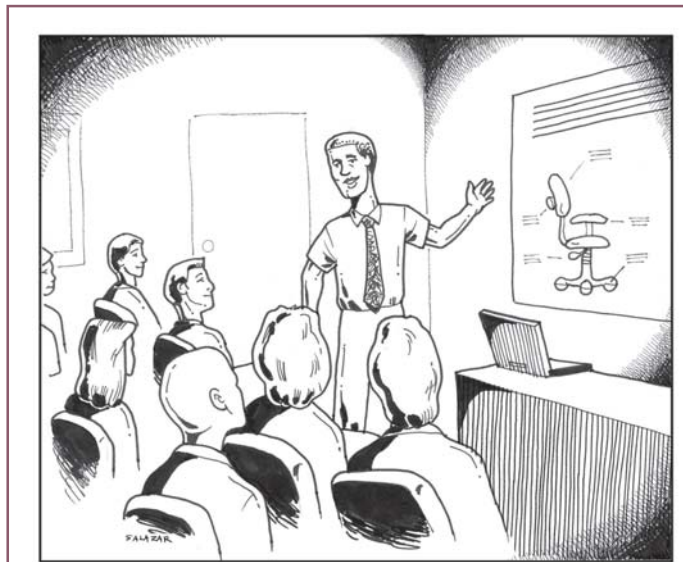
This includes work surface depth. Remind them that the desk should allow them to view the monitor at a distance of at least 20 inches. The monitor should be placed so that the top line of the screen is at or below eye level. For chair adjustment, make sure the seat is comfortable and allows the employee’s feet to rest flat on the floor or footrest. The backrest should conform to the natural curvature of the spine and provide adequate lumbar support.

- **Location of frequently used items.** Fre-

quently used devices, such as a keyboard, phone and mouse, should remain within the primary work zone. Remind workers that they should not have to stretch and bend to reach these items.

- **Good working postures.** A simple overview of good working postures should be included in the training. Even if the employee has a good idea of how to adjust the equipment, poor posture can still result in an injury over time.

To understand the best way to set up a computer workstation, it is helpful for employees to understand the concept of neutral body positioning. This is a comfortable working posture in which your joints are naturally



Training programs can educate employees about new office equipment such as chairs. □

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aligned. Working with the body in a neutral position reduces stress and strain on the muscles, tendons and skeletal system, and reduces the risk of developing a MSD.

When working at a desk, employees should remember to keep hands, wrists and forearms straight, in line and roughly parallel to the floor. The head should be level or bent slightly forward, forward facing and balanced. Generally, it should be in line with the torso. Elbows should stay in close to the body and be bent between 90 and 120 degrees. The back should be fully supported with appropriate lumbar support when sitting vertically or leaning back slightly.

2. Perform an individual evaluation and provide a “prescription.” Following the group training, Young visits each employee at his workstation and performs an individual evaluation. “We will take a look at their workstation setup and write them a ‘prescription,’” she said. “This is essentially a list of things that they should be checking on a daily basis, such as the placement of their monitor, height of the chair and desk, location of frequently used items and other important information.”

In addition to providing guides on how to adjust the equipment, employers can also set up a Web page on the company’s internal network. This site, which can be accessed by all employees, can include detailed diagrams and descriptions of how to adjust and use office equipment. It can also include a list of frequently asked questions that employees might have about their equipment.

3. Review changes on a regular basis. Young recommends that employers set a follow-up date with each employee after performing the one-on-one evaluation of the work space. This is especially important if the employee hasn’t received all of his equipment at the time of the initial evaluation.

“We make sure to set a time to come back and take a look at their work area to see if any new problems might have arisen,” Young said. “However, we try to put it in their heads that if they have a problem with their equipment, they should call us right away. Too often employees will ignore problems for months before reporting them, and by that time it is too late. A lot of MSDs can be avoided if you can catch them early enough.”

4. Don’t forget about new employees. Young said it is important not to let new employees fall through the cracks. Make sure that office equipment training is part of your company’s orientation program.

Young recommends sending out an e-mail message to all supervisors and managers who might have something to do with the new employee and let them know that the person must attend a safety class. This also provides you

ADJUSTABLE CHAIRS, DESKS MOST IMPORTANT IN WORKPLACE SETUP

If your company is in the process of overhauling the workplace with new office equipment, there are a couple of things you should consider before making a purchase.

“Too often companies make knee-jerk decisions to buy furniture and office equipment,” said **Wendy Young**, president and founder of **ErgoPro** in Bellaire, Texas. “There are a couple of problems that happen in this situation — they buy the wrong kind of equipment and fail to train their employees.”

Young said the foremost thing employers should look for when making new purchases is adjustability. “With many employees spending 80 to 90 percent of their day sitting at a computer work area, it is very important to get high-quality, adjustable furniture,” she said. “The two most important items are an adjustable desk and chair.”

What are the good qualities of an adjustable desk and chair? Adjustable desks come in a variety of sizes and styles. Some electronically adjustable desks allow the user to switch between sitting and standing. According to Young, a proper desk should:

- **Be able to accommodate a variety of working postures.** The surface should be height adjustable between 20 and 28 inches. In some cases, Young said, employers may have to purchase special equipment for individuals who are shorter or taller than the average employee. However, elbow height determines the proper surface height, so it is important to make sure all employees can fit within this range.

- **Allow the user to place the monitor directly in front of them, at least 20 inches away.**

If an employer can only afford one item, Young recommends purchasing an adjustable chair. A chair should have the following features:

- **Height adjustable, especially when shared by a number of users.** The chair height is appropriate when the entire sole of the foot can rest on the floor with the back of the knee slightly higher than the seat of the chair.

- **A seat that is comfortable and allows the individual’s feet to rest flat on the floor or footrest.**

- **A lumbar support that is height adjustable so it can be appropriately placed to fit the lower back.** The outward curve of the backrest should fit into the small of the back. □

with an opportunity to remind them to let the employee know of any changes in office equipment or work processes that may present new safety risks.

For more information, contact Wendy Young at (800) 374-6776 or visit www.ergopro.com. □

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