

PARTICIPATIVE ERGONOMICS

Workers have an expert knowledge of the manual tasks they perform and are therefore in the best position to undertake the manual task risk management process.

Effective implementation of the risk management process is essential to reduce the overall risk from hazardous manual tasks and prevent musculoskeletal disorders. The internationally recommended approach to achieve this is *participative ergonomics*.

The basic concept is to involve workers in improving their workplace to reduce injury and improve productivity. Workers who perform the manual tasks have an expert knowledge of those tasks and therefore are best placed to undertake the risk management process of hazard identification, risk assessment, risk control and evaluation.

Work teams, generally consisting of a supervisor and a small group of workers, identify the hazardous manual tasks in their work and complete the risk

assessment process. Access to ergonomics expert assistance or an occupational safety and health professional may be required to assist work teams with difficult or complex problems.

Based on the risk assessment, the team, in consultation with management, develops risk control options and plans the implementation of the risk control measures. The work team is also responsible for evaluating the control measures once implemented.

It is essential that the work team members are appropriately trained so they have the knowledge and skills to effectively undertake the risk management process. Management commitment and effective risk management systems are required for the approach to be effective in reducing manual task risk.

The benefits of a participative ergonomics approach include:

- better identification of hazardous manual tasks, risk assessment and solutions because of the workers' hands-on and relevant knowledge and experience with the task;
- worker ownership of the process resulting in increased support for implementing control measures;
- improved team work and cooperation; and
- positive impact on the workplace safety culture.

Further information

The handbook and training video produced in 2004 from Project C11058 *Reducing*

Musculoskeletal Risk in Open Cut Coal Mining, and funded by the Australian Coal Association Research Program, provide guidance on implementing a participative ergonomics programme, PERforM, in the mining industry. The handbook is available at ergonomics.uq.edu.au/download/C11058.pdf or can be downloaded or purchased with accompanying DVD at www.burgess-limerick.com

The *National Code of Practice for the Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders from Performing Manual Tasks at Work* provides guidelines and tools for workplaces to implement the risk management process for hazardous manual tasks. The code can be downloaded from the Australian Safety and Compensation Council website at www.ascc.gov.au

References

AUSTRALIAN SAFETY AND COMPENSATION COUNCIL, 2007, *National Code of Practice for the Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders from Performing Manual Tasks at Work*: Australian Government, Canberra, 127 pp.

BURGESS-LIMERICK, R., LEVERITT, S., NICHOLSON, M., and STRAKER, L., 2004, *Reducing Musculoskeletal Risk in Open Cut Coal Mining: The University of Queensland and Australian Coal Association Research Program*, Brisbane, 43 pp.

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