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Ergonomics painful if business ignores it

Ergonomics and efforts to reduce workplace strain have become hot items in corporate America as the true costs of employee injuries have emerged. Troy-based Munro & Associates, Inc. consults with companies to simplify workplace tasks and design processes that reduce costs and strain. David Foreman is an associate at Munro & Associates and recently spoke with Crain's about workers' compensation, ergonomics and other workplace issues.

Why should industry care about ergonomics?

It's too costly *not* to think about it. Our clients in the automotive industry find workers' compensation costs equal about \$600 per vehicle — that's equivalent to what they spend for steel in a car.

And for aircraft, workers' compensation costs are three times the cost of the aluminum. It's also morally correct. Almost all on-the-job injuries are preventable.

What are the most common ergonomic problems?



**THE
FINAL
WORD**

David Foreman
Associate,
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Although carpal tunnel syndrome is the most publicized, lower-back pain accounts for approximately 20 percent of all injuries and about 25 percent of workers' compensation costs. In fact, back injuries account for twice as much cost as carpal tunnel injuries; and for lost days, back injuries are second to the common cold.

Where can companies make the most improvements in ergonomics?

Companies usually can tell you where most injuries occur. These high-risk areas are where we can get the biggest bang for the buck. What they can't tell you is why they occur and what causes them to occur. We study the level of work and prescribe remedies.

Such as?

We help by designing out problems — by designing the workstation so the operator doesn't do anything to injure himself.

We use a computer program that measures the worker's metabolic rate and energy expenditure. This allows us to evaluate operator exertion and prescribe solutions. Worker overexertion — which is the most common cause of workplace injuries and account for 31 percent of all injuries — can lead to errors and cause serious injury. **CDB**

—David Barkholz

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