

Your company is moving to a new office and you've just received budget approval for new office furniture. Now what? The layout and design of your office will probably affect the performance and health of your office staff more than any other factor. Properly designed workstations positively impact every aspect of the work environment from decreasing time on task, to improving space utilization, to reducing risk factors for work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs). »



Ergonomic Office Design

Maximizing Performance and Comfort

By Jeffrey Smagacz, CPE

Whether you are knowledgeable in ergonomics or a novice, you can design a more healthy and productive office environment if you follow some simple guidelines. Ergonomic office design consists of these four basic phases: understanding your office needs, planning your purchase, implementation and installation, and measuring your success. At each phase, employee participation and the utilization of specific ergonomic criteria will ensure the success of your new space.

Understanding Your Office Needs

The first step in designing your new office is to determine the tasks required for each job classification (i.e., clerical, data entry, supervisors, etc.) and to assess opportunities for





improvement. Gather this data using tools such as employee surveys and job descriptions. Once you understand your workstation needs, begin investigating options that are available from various furniture manufacturers. Use preliminary drawings of planned workspaces to help you develop ideas. During this phase, encourage employee involvement by forming an ergonomics team and training members in ergonomics awareness.

Planning Your Purchase

As you finalize your furniture plans for each job classification, make sure your decisions are based on ergonomics guidelines for each component (chairs, keyboard trays, etc.). You can obtain such guidelines from organizations including the *Human Factors and Ergonomics Society*, www.hfes.org; and the *Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturer's Association*, www.bifma.com.

Adjustability is the key for most office components. Have a representative sample of your office population take your final furniture selections on a "test-drive" for a few weeks and make sure they learn how to use and adjust the equipment. At this point, identify any existing components of your current office environment that is still usable. Then you'll be able to complete final furniture requirements for each job classification.

Implementation and Installation

Once you and your team have made the final furniture selections, consult your ergonomics guidelines and checklists to ensure proper installation of office furniture.

It is also extremely important to devise a plan for training associates on the use of all new equipment. An ergonomically correct chair has little value if the employee has no idea how to adjust the chair's features. Basic ergonomics awareness training can educate employees to recognize symptoms before they move to illness or injury, and give employees "ergo eyes" to identify and implement some of their own workstation improvements.

Measuring Your Success

Once your new office is complete, document your success and share it with others in your organization. Explain your decisions and reasons for making them. Use before and after pictures to highlight your improvements, and give each employee a follow-up survey to check for success. Most importantly, keep in mind that ergonomics is a process of continuous improvement and requires a sustained effort. Periodic workstation reviews and awareness training for new employees will help ensure long term gain.



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Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturer's Association
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www.hfes.org

www.ergosolutionsmag.com/officedesign

