

Welcome!

Welcome to the April issue of **Forward Momentum**, where we will discuss how to optimize, protect and empower your workforce. OHS is all about you -- your business, your future, your forward momentum.

- In this issue, David Brandenburg, CPE, will take a look at the costs and benefits of adjustable and sit/stand workstations. He will compare the different varieties and options in terms of adjustability, price, usability, configurations and the pros and cons of several popular varieties. (p. 2)
- The debate about OSHA's proposed addition of an MSD column in the 300 Log roars on. In this issue, we will look at some of the common arguments for such an addition, as made by OSHA, as well as arguments against the addition made by organizations opposed to the proposal. (p. 4)

Your Partner In Health,



“Adjustable Workstations: The Great Debate”

-David Brandenburg, CPE
Omega Health Systems

Considering an adjustable workstation? Check out this article weighing the pros and cons of the investment and exploring the many adjustable workstation options.

Read more, page 2



In the News: OSHA's MSD Recordkeeping Proposal Sparks Debate

OSHA's proposed addition to the 300 Log, requiring employers to record musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) in a separate column continues to face heated protest. On March 30, 2010, 19 associations submitted extensive comments to OSHA expressing their concern about such an addition.

For a summary of these comments and concerns, visit:

<http://www.ieci.org/uploads/10AprilMSDCommentsSummary.pdf>.

For a summary of the benefits (according to OSHA) and costs (according to opponents) of the implementation of a separate column for MSDs on the OSHA 300 Log, **see page 4**.



“Adjustable Workstations: The Great Debate”

-Dave Brandenburg, CPE

Very often when the discussion of adjustable workstations comes up, the characteristics of sitting vs. standing while working are debated. To be sure, most of us sit much more than is healthy for our bodies. When a person sits, there is more pressure on the lower back and the heart rate stays low. It is encouraging that there is a progression toward people having the option to stand and work, as our bodies are designed to move. However, static standing is just as bad for your back as static sitting—it is more fatiguing and there are some tasks that are more easily done while sitting.

A Cornell study shows that people with sit/stand workstations use them at a standing height about 15 minutes a day. Even this short amount of time helps by increasing movement and reducing static sitting postures. Subjective data from the study shows that people are overall very happy with their sit/stand workstations.

Most organizations aren't prepared for the significant upfront cost of sit/stand desks, but that doesn't mean you can't have any adjustability for the worksurface at a reasonable cost; there is a great deal of value to be gained from a workstation that is at least adjustable in users' seated range, which for 90% of us is 22"-32" from the floor.

A typical office workstation is set at a fixed height of 28.5"-30", and to accommodate shorter users, adjustable keyboard trays can be installed. However, a typical keyboard tray can only be lowered about 5" below that fixed desk height, bringing the keyboard down to around 24". For a shorter worker, that still might not be low enough. Even if the most adjustable keyboard tray is installed, that person may strain to reach up at their desk while seated, and the monitor will most likely be too high, putting strain on their neck and eyes.

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User-Adjustable Workstation, Telescoping Legs with a Crank

A Comparison of User-Adjustable Workstations

| Type | Height | Price | Usability | Configurations | Pros | Cons |
|--|---------|--|---|---|--|---|
| Telescoping Legs with a crank | 22"-32" | 25% more than a fixed height desk | Slow to adjust, cranks hard to reach | Numerous | Low Cost, Various Configurations | Difficult to adjust |
| Spring-Loaded Telescoping Legs | 26"-43" | 50% more than a fixed height desk | Lift centered awkwardly in middle of desk | Limited. Too tall for short users to sit; too short for tall users to stand | Easier to adjust | Limited Configurations; only beneficial as a small desk |
| Telescoping Legs with an electric motor | 22"-50" | 50%-100% more than a fixed height desk | Easiest to use | Numerous | Ease of Use, Widest Range of Adjustability | Expensive |

“Adjustable Workstations” cont. from pg. 2

Another common issue is that shorter people are forced to choose between getting solid foot support or proper back support; this is due to movement away from the lumbar support of their chair to get their feet flat on the ground. People tend to support their feet rather than their back because it allows them to move around the workstation and get in and out of the chair more easily. Even so, an unsupported back has a great deal of pressure on it once the postural muscles get fatigued. This can cause a person to lean on their hands and arms to get support for their upper body, which increases strain on the arms and shoulders and makes it more difficult to use their hands.

What about just giving these shorter folks footrests? Those can occasionally and/or temporarily help, but in the long-term most people want their feet on the ground to feel stable when seated.

The better solution would be to have a worksurface that can be raised and lowered, to accommodate the varied sizes and preferences of our workforce. Let's look closer at some of the types of adjustable tables. There are two classes of adjustable tables: installer-adjustable, meaning the table can be assembled at different specified heights but needs to be taken apart each time its adjusted; or user-adjustable, meaning that the table can be freely adjusted after installation and during its use.

Installer-adjustable desks include: desks with telescoping legs using a pin inserted into pre-drilled holes at heights of 26"-32", and modular desks where the worksurface can be positioned at a 3"-4" range on the legs. The advantages of installer adjustable desks are that they look and feel like traditional desks and, in the case of systems furniture, can be specified at all the same sizes. Also, the cost is the same or minimally more expensive than a comparable fixed-height model. The major disadvantage of these models is that someone needs to take the desk apart each time it needs to be adjusted. In terms of labor, this can cost a few hundred dollars for a standard L-shaped desk.



User-adjustable options are shown on the previous page in a table addressing the pros and cons of the three main choices.

In the long-term, the savings from increased comfort, reduced injury risk (and, in effect, insurance premiums) and increased productivity will allow a user-adjustable desk to pay for itself. However, the person must be trained and encouraged to take advantage of its benefits. If there is one thing we as humans have learned from wearing clothing, it's that one size does not fit all. This needs to be remembered when considering workstation design.

References;

Hedge, A. and Ray, E.J. (2004) Effects of an electronic height-adjustable worksurface on self-assessed musculoskeletal discomfort and productivity among computer workers, Proceedings of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society 48th Annual Meeting, New Orleans, Sept. 20-24, HFES, Santa Monica, 1091-1095.

Our Systems



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is the next generation of ergonomic software. With Storm Lake Software, OHS has developed this advanced new product which allows you to deliver, collect and manage discomfort and risk surveys for thousands of workers across hundreds of projects, perform advanced ergonomic risk analysis (RULA, REBA and NIOSH lifting equation) and browse the solutions library to effectively reduce ergonomic risk with the click of a mouse.



is a system leveraging award-winning Cardinus software (Workstation Safety Plus), in conjunction with early intervention tactics, such as telephonic intervention, ergonomic desk assessments and ongoing reports and metrics, to reduce risk and costs associated with workplace injury.

The Good, the Bad and the OSHA 300 Log

Common Arguments For:

- ✓ By reporting MSDs in a separate column, previously uncollected data will be gained.
- ✓ The data collected will lead to much-needed insight into MSDs in America.
- ✓ The initial cost will benefit organizations, providing them with metrics useful on an organizational level.
- ✓ Insight gained will allow OSHA to target MSD problem industries more effectively.
- ✓ It is likely that an MSD column will help specify illnesses and disorders listed under the "all other illnesses" column of the log.

Common Arguments Against:

- ✓ Due to the inexact nature of defining MSDs, the data collected will be neither detailed nor reliable.
- ✓ Even if insight is gained, this requirement will not decrease the instances of MSDs. Reporting of minor discomfort will likely increase.
- ✓ A new reporting regulation will burden businesses with increased administration costs.
- ✓ Reporting of MSDs will rely on unscientific guesswork by administration, as there is no agreed upon definition, and determining if the injury is work-related can be difficult.



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