Ergonomic Problem Solving (EPS)

Ergonomics is the science of fitting the workstation, task, or tools to the worker to improve productivity and reduce injury potential. When there is an improper fit between the worker and the workstation, task, or tools, the result is inefficiency, injury, and hampered production.

Ergonomic injuries are often known as musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs), repetitive motion disorders (RDIs), or cumulative trauma disorders (CTDs). The U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2011) shows musculoskeletal disorders accounted for 33% of all workplace injury and illness cases.

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PMA developed the EPS tool to help organizations help themselves when it comes to solving ergonomic problems. EPS leverages your internal knowledge of job tasks coupled with PMA ergonomic assessment and problem-solving tools. The result helps to identify solutions and prioritize improvements in your operations.

In less than one day, a PMA Risk Control professional can facilitate this training at your facility and help employees develop an “ErgoEye” for their job tasks. This provides you the ability to analyze and address ergonomic issues with your own in-house ergonomics response team.

How Does the EPS Team Training Approach Work?

1. **Loss analysis.** A PMA Risk Control professional examines your organization’s workers’ compensation losses looking for ergonomic-related injuries by location, cost center, department, shift, job task, and job title. Interviews with key supervisors and managers add internal perspectives to pinpoint exactly where the ergonomic issues and improvement opportunities exist.

2. **Team member identification.** Form a workplace EPS Team comprised of workers from all appropriate areas experiencing the ergonomic issues. Safety coordinators, engineers, machinists, equipment operators, production workers, maintenance, team leaders, and operation management are all good candidates. With EPS, the team will create the solution and make it work. The EPS team will also track progress and the need for additional changes. Employee “buy-in” is enhanced through this creative collaborative approach to problem-solving.

3. **Classroom training.** A PMA Risk Control professional trains your EPS team with the knowledge necessary to identify ergonomic risks and resolve them. The training session takes approximately four hours in one session for best continuity, but can be split into multiple shorter sessions.

4. **Knowledge and tools.** The session generally includes:
   - Video review of employees’ actual job tasks and discussions on their various ergonomic elements
   - Basic knowledge of how ergonomics impacts production, quality, and safety
   - Risk Factor Identification, development of each team member’s “ergo eye” and “getting back to neutral” work positions
   - Basic ergonomic principles—solutions to eliminate or reduce risk factors that can lead to MSIs, RDIs, or CTDs
   - Tools for brainstorming and prioritizing solutions
   - PMA Technical Guides, including Standing Workstation Design, Seated Workstation Design, and Hand Tool Design
The Role of the EPS Team
Once formed and trained, your EPS Team works together to help reduce or eliminate ergonomic-related issues in your organization. The team generally follows a four-step process:

1. Identify ergonomic-related risk factors and why they exist in your operations.
2. Brainstorm solutions to reduce or eliminate the risk factors that lead to injuries. It’s important for the team to list all possible ideas and solutions.
3. From the brainstorming list, identify the “Best Practices” or most effective workstation/work flow modifications to reduce or eliminate the ergonomic risk factors.
4. Recommend ideas for improvements to management and assist with designing and delivering the corrective actions.

Your PMA Risk Control professional can also assist in measuring the progress of your EPS Team and making recommendations in areas where you may need additional help.

Is EPS a Good Fit for my Organization?
If your organization’s employee injuries seem repetitive and predictable, no matter your industry, you may have ongoing ergonomic risk factors present in your operations. Talk to your PMA Risk Control professional today about an initial analysis of your loss trends by location, department, and job type.

Your solution to fewer workplace injuries and improved production could be PMA’s unique approach to Ergonomic Problem Solving.

About PMA Companies
PMA Companies (www.pmacompanies.com) provides risk management solutions and services in the U.S., specializing in workers’ compensation for larger accounts.

Headquartered in Blue Bell, PA, PMA Companies is part of the Old Republic General Insurance Group (www.oldrepublicinsurancegroup.com), the largest business segment within Old Republic International (NYSE: ORI), one of the nation’s 50 largest publicly held insurance organizations.

PMA Companies includes:
- **PMA Insurance Group**, specializing in workers’ compensation, and providing other commercial property & casualty insurance products
- **PMA Management Corp. and PMA Management Corp. of New England**, providing results-driven TPA and Risk Services specializing in workers’ compensation and liability

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