

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL SERVICES
BUREAU OF HUMAN RESOURCES

February 8, 2000

HUMAN RESOURCES MEMORANDUM 1-00

TO: All Agency Department Heads, Human Resource Representatives

SUBJECT: ***ERGONOMICS POLICY FOR COMPUTER USE AND OTHER REPETITIVE MOTION TASKS***

Ergonomics disorders are the leading cause of injury and illness for state employees. Ergonomic disorders are commonly referred to as work related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs), repetitive motion injuries, repetitive strain injuries, or cumulative trauma disorders. Ergonomics is the science of adapting the work environment to fit the needs of the worker.

1.0 Introduction

This ergonomics policy is aimed at identifying and preventing the causes of work related musculoskeletal disorders. Ergonomic risk factors include: a workstation not adjusted to the individual, awkward and poor postures, excessive forces, repetitive motion tasks, psychosocial strains and environmental factors such as lighting and temperature. The purpose of this policy is to protect state employees from illnesses and injuries caused by computer use and other repetitive motion tasks. This can be accomplished by implementing ergonomic practices that will reduce the risks associated with work related musculoskeletal disorders.

This policy applies to all state employees who work with computers, at a computer workstation, with related office equipment and at other jobs involving repetitive motion tasks. Both departmental management and employees shall be committed to supporting this policy. In addition, departmental management will advise their staff to adhere to this policy in a persistent and systematic way. At the departmental level, managers will be responsible for implementing this policy and the associated ergonomics program in a way that meets the needs of their individual departments.

This policy is aimed at identifying and preventing illness and injury in order to maintain a healthy and productive workforce and work environment. This policy and associated ergonomics program provides the guidance to specifically and prudently address work related musculoskeletal disorders and to implement an integrated, risk based ergonomics program.

2.0 Scope

The scope of this policy encompasses all employees who work with or supervise others who work with computers, at computer workstations, use other office-related equipment and at other jobs involving repetitive motion tasks.

3.0 Goals and Objectives

The goal of this policy is to minimize the effect of work related musculoskeletal disorders throughout the state employee workforce. The specific objectives are to:

3.1 To develop and implement focused programs designed to prevent and eliminate the most significant causes of ergonomic disorders.

3.2 Integrate recognition, evaluation and control of ergonomic disorders into established departmental health and safety programs.

3.3 Ensure that planning for the necessary resources to execute this policy and associated program is included in departmental strategic and fiscal (budgetary) plans.

3.4 To provide departments with an effective ergonomics program model that (1) enhances their mission by reducing ergonomic disorders and (2) focuses limited resources toward addressing hazards that represent an unacceptable risk to departmental employees.

4.0 Policy Components

To reduce the risks associated with computer and office equipment use and the risks associated with other jobs involving repetitive motion tasks, this policy will encompass:

- a. Hazard Recognition and Control
- b. Ergonomic Evaluations
- c. Education and Training
- d. Work - Rest Cycles
- e. Ergonomic Programs
- f. Evaluation

a. Hazard Recognition and Control: Employees who work with computers, at a computer workstation or at other workstations where they are involved in repetitive motion tasks will have their work area or workstation evaluated or assessed to determine that it fits the ergonomic needs of the worker. These evaluations or assessments will be performed in consultation with the worker whose area or workstation is being evaluated. When necessary, the work area or workstation will be adjusted or modified, as needed, to eliminate or minimize the risk of musculoskeletal injury or illness to the employee. The immediate supervisor will be responsible for seeing to it that any recommendations and modifications are carried out. Employees new to the department will have their work area or workstation evaluated and, if necessary, modified within the first sixty (60) days of their employment with the department.

Any new computer workstations, as well as any work area or workstation chairs purchased after the effective date of this policy will be adjustable and purchased according to the standards, guidelines and procedures established by the Bureau of Purchases.

b. Ergonomic Evaluations: Each department will be responsible for arranging workstation evaluations for their employees.

Implementation Note: To accomplish this responsibility, departments may elect to:

1. Contract with an outside vendor to conduct the evaluations; or
2. Develop an in-house team of ergonomic evaluators; or
3. Utilize the systems furniture vendor specified under a Bureau of Purchases furniture contract.

b1. In-house Team of Evaluators: A department may choose to develop an in-house team of ergonomic evaluators. This would be a core group of employees trained to the level of proficiency necessary to carry out these initial, basic work area or workstation evaluations or assessments. For those departments with staffs located throughout the state, departments will insure that enough appropriately trained in-house evaluators will be available to or located at regional locations to accomplish evaluations or assessments at those locations within the required time frame. The Director of Employee Health and Safety will approve the training program used to train the ergonomic evaluators prior to the commencement of any training programs. Existing in-house ergonomic evaluators may continue to be used with the approval of the Director of Employee Health and Safety.

c. Education and Training: All employees who work with computers shall be provided with training related to the ergonomic issues associated with computer use. This training shall include, at a minimum:

1. Employee rights and employer duties as prescribed by Maine law Title 26 Section 251 et. seq.
2. An explanation or description of the proper use of computers and the measures the employer and employee may take to prevent work related musculoskeletal disorders.
3. Recognition of the early signs and symptoms of ergonomic injuries or illnesses that may result from extended or improper use of computers and the importance of reporting to supervisory personnel when these signs and symptoms appear.
4. To whom and how to report the early sign and symptoms of work related musculoskeletal disorders.
5. Instruction related to the importance of maintaining proper posture during computer use, including the use of adjustable workstation equipment.

6. How non-work related activities may put the employee at risk for developing an ergonomic disorder.

Current employees will receive this training on an annual basis. New employees shall receive this training within their first month of employment with the department. Employees transferring from one state department to another department and who have had this training within the last 12 months will be exempt from the new employee training requirement.

Supervisors will maintain a record that each of their employees has received this annual training.

Implementation Note: To accomplish this training, departments may elect to:

- 1) Provide this training via CD-ROM at the individual's workstation, supplemented with written materials; or
- 2) Provide this training via the department's network, supplemented with written materials; or
- 3) Provide this training through in-house training classes, which include written materials.

Some departmental employees may already be required by Maine law to participate in a Video Display Terminal training and education program. This statute, Title 26 MRSA Section 251, outlines the required training requirements and training schedule. This statute covers any employee whose primary task is to operate a terminal for more than four consecutive hours, exclusive of breaks, on a daily basis.

d. Work - Rest Cycles: Departmental managers and supervisors will insure that employees who are working on computers take their scheduled rest and meal breaks

Implementation Note: It should be noted that the current MSEA contracts already contain the following language in Article 66: No employee shall be required to work more than two (2) continuous hours on a video display terminal. Employees whose job assignment requires them to work on VDT's should be assigned other work or activities for thirty (30) minutes for each two (2) hours of continuous work on the terminals. Rest and meal periods shall be counted toward the thirty (30) minutes.

Therefore, it needs to be emphasized that managers and supervisors encourage their employees to take their rest and meal breaks. Also, it should be emphasized that participation in stretching and exercise should be completely voluntary, unless a work rule has been developed and approved through the recognized standard process.

e. Ergonomic Program: Managers for each department shall develop an ergonomics program appropriate for their department. Programs shall include the following components:

1. A written plan
2. Employee involvement and management commitment of authority and resources
3. Work place analysis
4. Hazard prevention and control
5. Health care management of injured workers
6. Education and training
7. Program evaluation and review
8. Equipment acquisition

Departmental programs will be subject to audit by the Director of Employee Health and Safety or designee.

f. Evaluation: A department should evaluate its ergonomic program efforts on a yearly basis. Any deficiencies found should be appropriately and promptly corrected.

g. Certification: On July 1 of each year, the Commissioner of each department will certify to the Director of Employee Health and Safety that their department is in compliance with this policy.

State of Maine Departmental Ergonomics Program **Guidelines**

Successful ergonomic programs typically have the following program elements:

1. A written plan
2. Employee involvement and management commitment of authority and resources
3. Workplace analysis
4. Hazard prevention and control
5. Health care management of injured workers
6. Education and training
7. Program evaluation and review
8. Material acquisitions

Successful programs are also built on the needs of an individual department. Since each department's needs will be different, an "off - the - shelf" or cookie cutter approach to ergonomic

program development will ultimately not work. Since everyone's resources are limited, maximum effectiveness must be made of invested resources.

1. A Written Plan - Each department should prepare a written plan for a comprehensive ergonomic program. As a minimum, a written plan should include:

- a) Goals and objectives
- b) How the ergonomics program will interface with the department's other health and safety initiatives as well as the department's operational programs
- c) How the ergonomics program will address each of the ergonomic program elements

The degree of emphasis each program element receives in a plan will vary according to the hazards and needs of each department.

2. Employee Involvement and Management Commitment of Authority and Resources -

Each department should designate an Ergonomics Program Coordinator. This person would oversee the department's ergonomic program efforts and serve as a point of contact for the department. A joint labor - management committee should be charged with addressing departmental ergonomic issues. Ergonomic issues may be addressed by the existing departmental health and safety committee, or a department may elect to develop a separate labor - management ergonomics committee using the existing health and safety committee model. There should be a link between the department's ergonomic evaluators, the Program Coordinator and the committee responsible for the ergonomic program. The committee should be involved in recognizing and analyzing ergonomic problem areas, recommending controls, training and education, recruiting ergonomic evaluation team members, dealing with employee complaints and suggestions and keeping employees informed about ergonomic issues and the ergonomics program.

Management can demonstrate its commitment to the ergonomic program and issues by:

- a. Placing ergonomic health and safety issues at the same level of importance as other health and safety issues
- b. Placing ergonomic and safety issues at the same level of importance as operational needs and programs
- c. Ensuring evaluation and if necessary, modification of workstations and job tasks through the implementation of engineering, work practice and administrative controls

3. Worksite Analysis - An ergonomics worksite analysis can be thought of as a health and safety review of ergonomic issues. Worksite analysis is a structured process for identifying jobs or workstations that may contain ergonomic hazards, ergonomic risk factors that create the hazards and the causes of the risk factors. Worksite analysis tools and strategies might include:

- a. Records review
- b. A symptoms or comfort survey
- c. A review of incident/severity rates
- d. Specialized or focused projects
- e. A survey of jobs and work positions for ergonomic hazards
- f. Identification of risk factors through inspections

4. Hazard Prevention and Control - This part of a program results in changes to jobs, workstations, tools and the environment to fit the worker. It is the active process of eliminating or reducing the risk factors associated with workplace musculoskeletal disorders by changing the things that contribute to the risk factors. Intervention strategies might include: process elimination, engineering controls, substitution, changes to work practices, or administrative controls.

5. Health Care Management of Injured Workers - Each department should develop and implement written guidelines for the early recognition and reporting of ergonomic illnesses and injuries. Early intervention benefits both the employee and the department. These guidelines should also include how the department will comply with the evaluation, treatment, follow-up and return-to-work policies of the state's Worker's Compensation Unit.

6. Education and Training - Departments should develop a program for the delivery of ergonomic education and training to all workers exposed to one or more ergonomic stressors, as well as to the supervisors who supervise these employees. The education and training should provide information in a manner employees can understand and shall include the content specified in the state's ergonomic policy.

7. Program Evaluation - Each department will be responsible for evaluating and measuring the effectiveness of their ongoing ergonomic interventions and level of participation.

8. Material Acquisition - Each department shall consider the ergonomic impact and ergonomic design when purchasing furniture and equipment.

S/ **Donald A. Wills**

Donald A. Wills, Director
Bureau of Human Resources

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DAWills', written over a horizontal line.