



## The Term “Ergonomics”

Ergonomics is an important term that is currently receiving a great deal of attention from safety professionals. Simply defined, ergonomics is the scientific study of human work. It considers the physical and mental capabilities and limits of people as they interact with tools, equipment, work methods, tasks, and the environment. The primary goal of an ergonomics program is to reduce work-related injuries and illnesses by adapting the work to fit the person, instead of forcing the person to adapt to the work. The idea of ergonomics is to evaluate and control work conditions known to cause injuries and illnesses because of the excessive demands placed on people. In other words, "Let's find ways to work smarter rather than harder!"

It appears that the biggest challenge will be choosing the best ergonomic strategy to use for each particular situation. There are endless possibilities. A careful analysis of the situation should help in choosing the most effective strategy. As an example, let's look at just a few possible strategies to use in situations that currently involve manual handling activities. Eliminate the need to carry. This may not be feasible, but it should be the first strategy to consider.

- Rearrange the layout of the task to eliminate unnecessary carrying. This could involve relocation of receiving, storage, production, or shipping areas.
- Reduce the weight of the object being carried or increase the weight of the object so it is too heavy and must be handled by mechanical devices.
- Use mechanical handling aids such as forklifts, hand trucks cranes and four-wheel dollies.
- Assign the task of carrying bulky or awkwardly shaped objects to two or more people.
- Eliminate tripping hazards with good housekeeping practices.

You are encouraged to get involved and make suggestions to help in preventing injuries and illnesses by improving "ergonomic" safety. You can play a critical role in providing input for the decision-making process because of your familiarity with equipment, tools, and current work methods. An ergonomics program will only be successful if everyone works together as a team to come up with solutions. OSHA believes a large part of the initial ergonomics program at most companies will involve searching for ways to correct problems that have already caused injuries and illnesses. OSHA hopes the program will eventually focus on finding pro-active solutions to situations that could lead to injury if ergonomics issues are not addressed ahead of time.