

# TOOLBOX SAFETY TALK

### EXPLAIN DANGERS

Musculoskeletal injuries occur in the soft tissues of your body like the nerves, tendons, muscles, ligaments, and joints, and develop slowly over time.

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) may not seem very serious when symptoms first appear. They can start with minor discomfort in the early stages with symptoms that go away after a break, or at night when you are not at work. But as you return to the same activity, the symptoms also return. Over time, symptoms increase in intensity and eventually the body does not recover, even after rest.

Recognizing potential risk factors in work tasks that can lead to these symptoms is the first step to eliminating them.

Work can be made more comfortable and safer by using ergonomics. Ergonomics focuses on how people interact with their work space or working conditions, and how to make that interaction as safe and efficient as possible for each worker.

Think about tasks that are uncomfortable or difficult to perform. Try ergonomic solutions (modified work techniques, tools, or equipment) to reduce stress on your body.

### EXPLAIN RISK FACTORS

Common risks for ergonomic hazards include:

**Repetition** – Involves doing the same task repeatedly, using the same muscles over and over.

**High Force** – Using extra muscle power during activities such as heavy lifting, pushing items, or gripping tools.

**Awkward Postures** – Working with your body bent, twisted, extended, or flexed rather than in a neutral position.

**Contact Stress** – When pressure from an object is pushed on soft body tissues (i.e. tool handle).

**Hand-Arm Vibration** – Vibrations that enter the body from power tools or equipment.

Any of these hazards performed over long periods of time can cause problems, and activities with more than one ergonomic risk factor can increase physical discomfort even more.

### EXPLAIN PREVENTION

#### **Manual handling of tools and materials:**

- Use equipment (dollies, carts, hoists, motorized buggies) and other mechanical devices. Don't forget that other workers can help too.
- Break loads into smaller units; carry a 50lb load twice instead of a 100lb load once.
- Prepare by stretching and warming up before performing lifting tasks. Label materials, and use proper lifting techniques.

#### **Ground level work:**

- Bring the work up to your neutral posture by using tables or stands, and keep materials you use often at waist height.
- When you perform low-level work, change your position often (kneel, crouch, squat, or sit).
- If you need to kneel, make sure you use high quality knee pads.
- Use equipment with longer handles to minimize low level postures (bending over) if possible.

#### **Overhead work:**

- Use material lifts, scissor lifts, scaffolds, or other equipment that brings you closer to your work. This will minimize how far you move away from the neutral posture.

#### **Hand tools:**

- *One size does not fit all.* Employers need to provide tools that properly fit the worker's grip. Workers should:
  - Select tools that keep your wrist in a neutral posture, especially while exerting force.
  - Maintain tools in good working order to help minimize vibration.

### DEMONSTRATE

- Demonstrate neutral standing and sitting postures.
- Demonstrate awkward posture and how it affects strength.