

WINFORMA

KEEPING YOU INFORMED



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Special points of interest:

- ⇒ Learn the physical demand levels of work.
- ⇒ Quantify time on task objectively.
- ⇒ Have workers' comp benefits benefited workers or insurers?

About WINFORMA: Our newsletter is aptly named WIN-Forma, which means Worksite International Network (WIN) Information. The WIN consists of our trained and mentored consultants, employer and insurance clients, physicians and ergonomic product vendors all working together for the same purpose to prevent and manage work injuries more effectively. You will find a variety of articles to interest all of our members.

TIME ON TASK: QUANTIFYING WORK DEMANDS

Have you ever needed to describe what you do for a living to someone? If you have, you know that it is not all that easy. You likely explain in 30 seconds your job title and area of expertise but when they want to know more, it can be challenging to explain exactly what you do. As an ergonomist, I am often asked to assist my clients in developing job descriptions with essential job functions and physical demands that require the need to document what an employee does, how much time they spend on tasks and what kind of effort it takes to perform the tasks.

Job descriptions provide the cornerstone for numerous important activities for an employer including the following:

1. Hiring and firing
2. Performance reviews
3. Defense in an employment lawsuit such as ADA discrimination or workers' compensation
4. Return to work job modifications
5. Pre-hire screening criteria
6. Planning safety strategies

If the job descriptions are not current and accurate, it can have a significant impact on the situation increasing liability and cost to the employer. Furthermore if the job described is ambiguous, further problems can develop.

Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of creating job descriptions is that they remain objective and valid, effectively describing how the work is done. Employers often limit the objectivity in describing how work is done by not providing substantial detail regarding how much time is spent on tasks and the required physical demands. To be consistent, employers should engage in interviews with employees and supervisors to gain consensus on how work is done, to what extent it is done (i.e. time and effort required) and what physical and mental/cognitive demands it takes to do the job.

To identify the physical demands of a job, the employer needs to first define what exactly they are. Adjacent is a typical list of physical demands.

Mental, sensory and cognitive demands are not as easy to define for job requirements and maybe more vague.

Physical Demands of Work
Sitting
Standing
Walking
Pushing
Pulling
Lifting
Carrying
Crouching
Stooping
Kneeling
Crawling
Twisting
Bending
Handling
Climbing
Balancing

Continued on page 2

CALIFORNIA WORKERS' COMPENSATION UPDATE

SB899, the most recent workers' compensation reform went into effect on April 19, 2004, almost three years ago. The sweeping reform was overwhelmingly supported by both parties. The reform was implemented in an effort to control California's rising workers' compensation costs which were at \$6.46 per \$100.00 in payroll. In addition, over 20 private insurers filed for bankruptcy leaving primarily the SCIF to manage over 53% of the state's workers' compensation insurers.

Now that the dust has settled, the workers' comp system has had a number of significant changes, primarily in costs per payroll dollars. Premium rates are back to 1996 levels, \$4.42 per \$100 and are expected to drop another 6.3-9.5%. In addition, California has dropped to #46 in the USA as the highest workers' compensation rates in the country and still considered the "least business friendly" towards small business.

Other improvements reported include a 28% decrease in workers' comp claims which has significantly impacted the decline in overall claim costs. This however is a controversial change as it also could be due to diminished reporting by employees, an increase in claim denials, delayed medical treatment or restrictions in medical care provided by physical therapy or chiropractic care even *Continued on page 3*

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- ⇒ March 29-30, 2007: "Measuring Performance in Safety", ASSE, Costa Mesa, CA, www.asse.com
- ⇒ April 26-27, 2007: "DIY Ergonomics For Employers". Worksite International, Monterey, CA. 888-288-4463
- ⇒ June 26, 2007: "Half Truths and Flat Out Lies about Ergonomics", Office Master Showroom, 21730 Stevens Creek Blvd., Cupertino, CA



The new Office MasterYS78. See page 3 for details

"The television is an invention that permits you to be entertained in your living room by people you wouldn't have in your home."

David Frost

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TIME ON TASK (CONTINUED)

These demands include but are not limited to vision, hearing, memory, planning and organizing to name a few.

Mental, Sensory and Cognitive Demands of Work
Visual
Hearing
Memory
Planning/Organizing
Decision Making
Writing
Speech
Smell

These lists can be used by employees to identify

exactly what physical, mental and cognitive demands are needed to perform the essential functions of the job. To further define the effort needed, physical demand levels should be used in conjunction with time allocation units. "The Dictionary of Occupational Titles" developed by the US Department of Labor, (4th edition, 1986) uses the physical demand levels to standardize on the physical demand requirements at work. The DOT as it is referred to, describes over 10,000 jobs using a methodology that defines the physical demands at work. These terms can be used to describe the kind of effort it

takes to perform the work. They include the following:

- ⇒ Sedentary
- ⇒ Light
- ⇒ Medium
- ⇒ Medium-Heavy
- ⇒ Heavy
- ⇒ Very Heavy

Additional terms that help to describe work include time allocation units such as occasional, frequent and constant. These are also found in the DOT and refer to the frequency of "exerting a force", including lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling or any other physical activity. With this in mind, when creating well defined job descriptions, an employer should include the physical demands, the levels and time allocation units. *Continued pg 3*

PHYSICAL DEMAND LEVEL	OCCASIONAL % of Time.....0-33% Approximate Repetitions 1-20 or 1x/hour	FREQUENT % of Time..... 34-66% Approximate Repetitions.....20-250 or 1x@ 2 min	CONSTANT % of Time..... 67-100% Approximate Repetitions.....250+ or 1x@15 seconds
SEDENTARY	10 lbs.	Negligible	Negligible
LIGHT	20 lbs.	10 lbs (Walk/Stand and/or Push/Pull of Arm/ Leg Controls)	Negligible (Push/Pull of Arm/ Leg Controls While Sitting)
MEDIUM	50 lbs.	20 lbs.	10 lbs.
MEDIUM-HEAVY ²	75 lbs.	35 lbs.	15 lbs.
HEAVY	100 lbs.	50 lbs.	20 lbs.
VERY HEAVY	Over 100 lbs.	Over 50 lbs.	Over 20 lbs.

Table 1: The Physical Demand Levels of Work

Time on Task (continued)

Let's take an example of how this information can be used in a job description. The job definition below is taken from the DOT to describe the job of an instrument assembler. The strength requirement is light.

TITLE(s): INSTRUMENT ASSEMBLER (inst. & app.)

Assembles instruments and devices, such as barometers, control valves, gyroscopes, hygrometers, speedometers, tachometers, and thermostats, using handtools, power tools, and measuring instruments: Visually examines parts for defects. Fits, aligns, and secures internal and external component parts to assemble finished unit, using handtools, power tools, soldering iron, and measuring instruments. May inspect assembled unit for conformance to specifications, using measuring and testing equipment. May test functional performance of unit, using test equipment. May be designated according to product assembled as Regulator Assembler (inst. & app.); Thermostat Assembler (inst. & app.); Valve Assembler (inst. & app.).

The employer needs to define the time allocation for the task of hand tool use. Employees indicate they spend 4-5 hours/day using hand tools. To do this, break the task time down by minutes and calculate the appropriate time allocations using the table on page 2.

Typical 8 hr/day - 60 min of breaks =420 minutes of work.
Task time with hand tools: 240-300 min/day or 57%-71%.
Time allocation = Frequent to Constant hand tool use.
Approximate repetitions using hand tools at 1 time every 2 minutes at a physical demand of LIGHT.

Time allocation units not only provide validity and objectivity to how work is performed but it is also a valuable tool in identifying high risk tasks that may benefit with safety or ergonomic strategies to reduce force and repetition requirements.

Engaging employees and supervisors in creating or revising job descriptions is a good idea as it will build consensus and assure accuracy in how the job is done. Using the physical demand levels of work provides a level of reliability and objectivity to job descriptions helping the employer in many aspects of running an efficient and successful business from improved hiring practices to reducing liability to improved return to work.

If you need help updating your job descriptions or defining the physical demands at work, contact Worksite International at 888-288-4463.

if additional care would be beneficial. CALIFORNIA WORKERS' COMPENSATION UPDATE (CONTINUED)

Each employer must re-evaluate how the reforms have impacted individual businesses. As an employer, do you see reductions in your workers' compensation premiums, not necessarily related to your safety record? Have your permanent disability costs declined as a result of providing employees with permanent modified work? Have you been reimbursed by your insurer or the state for providing ergonomic accommodations to permanently injured employees if you have less than 50 employees? Are your injured employees getting the care they need to return back to work or has their care been delayed or denied and as a result out of work longer resulting in higher costs for you? Are you using ergonomic analysis more since the reforms to assist with return to work? Are your medical providers recommending ergonomic analysis to assist with better case management of cumulative trauma disorders or repetitive motion injuries?

Just as before, the reform was brought on by employers, legislators, unions and others seeking changes in the system to improve it for all those involved. While there have been some improvements made, more are needed. Let's not be satisfied with the status quo. Continue to work with state legislators and your insurers to assure your employees receive exceptional medical care to return them to productive work and keep your costs minimized.

ERGONOMIC PRODUCT SHOWROOM

Office Master has introduced a new product line of chairs recently that are based on years of research and development resulting in DCS Technology. Double comfort seating technology is now featured on the new Discovery line of chairs. The contoured seat pan now offers a molded, outer layer of memory foam which creates a unique print of

you. An underlying base of molded, high resilience, polyurethane foam provides additional stability where needed. DCS Technology provides ultimate softness and support for a unique seating experience. Contact Office Master for a trial at: 408-253-0985 or visit www.omcal.com.



The DB53



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ARE YOU ON THE BALL?

Have you noticed more and more people at work sitting at their workstations on large round balls? In a recent Wall Street Journal article, attention was focused on employees who use exercise balls in place of their ergonomic chairs. This alternative seating is not without controversy. There are both pros and cons to using a Swiss Ball in place of a supportive ergonomic chair. From a



negative perspective, the balls can be a safety hazard by increasing the likelihood of falling off the ball. Prolonged use can lead to significant postural fatigue and slouching leading to increased discomfort as reported by Gregory, et al at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. Furthermore, there is no height adjustability to allow for a better fit to the workstation or keyboard placement resulting in poor ergonomics at work.

On the positive side, the ball does promote dynamic sitting and increased muscle activity resulting in increased core stability and strength. Mental stimulation and a sense of “fun” at work are also reported by ball users. Companies such as Google and Bain and Co welcome the alternative seating and the cost savings.

Whether you decide to sit on the ball or not, keep the following pointers in mind. Build your tolerance for sitting on the ball. Don't sit any more than 2-3x/day for 30 minutes, since it is dynamic sitting. Preserve good office ergonomics... if you can't, then go back to your ergonomic chair and learn how to adjust it for better support and comfort. Limit sitting for 60 minutes at a time. You'll be glad you did!