

Understanding Ergonomics at Work (Part 2 of 5)

How can Ergonomics Improve Health and Safety?

- Applying ergonomics to the workplace:
 - reduces the potential for accidents
 - reduces the potential for injury and ill health
 - improves performance and productivity
- Ergonomics can reduce the likelihood of an accident. For example, in the design of control panels, consider:
 - the location of switches and buttons - switches that could be accidentally knocked on or off might start the wrong sequence of events that could lead to an accident
 - expectations of signals and controls - most people interpret green to indicate a safe condition. If a green light is used to indicate a 'warning or dangerous state' it may be ignored or overlooked
 - information overload - if a worker is given too much information they may become confused, make mistakes, or panic. In hazardous industries, incorrect decisions or mistaken actions have had catastrophic results

Ergonomics can also reduce the potential for ill health at work, such as aches and pains of the wrists, shoulders and back. Consider the layout of controls and equipment; these should be positioned in relation to how they are used. Those used most often should be placed where they are easy to reach without the need for stooping, stretching or hunching.

Failure to observe ergonomic principles may have serious repercussions, not only for individuals, but whole organisations. Many well-known accidents might have been prevented if ergonomics had been considered in designing the jobs people did and the systems within which they worked.