

Worksite modification success story

By Bruce Friedrichsen

Worker disability

Norman injured his right knee while employed as a school custodian. As result of his on-the-job injury, Norman has permanent limitations that restrict his ability to perform certain work duties. These limitations include not pushing or pulling more than 30 pounds and not lifting more than 35 pounds. Also, Norman is restricted from deep squats, kneeling, or stair climbing. Norman's employer valued his skills and requested worksite modification assistance through the employer-activated option.

Work setting and obstacles

Norman returned to his regular work, but he could not perform all the job duties. The method of pulling and pushing the old wooden bleachers involved getting assistance from a co-worker or some students. He could not push or pull the old bleachers even with help.

Cleaning the bathrooms required frequent squatting and kneeling, which he could no longer do. Norman had to frequently kneel or squat to pick up trash on the ground, which the injury-caused restrictions precluded. He took heavy trash to the trash compactor and then handled the compacted trash from the compactor to the dumpster. Norman also lifted and carried heavy art supplies, tables, and a stone turntable, and these duties could no longer be performed the same way.

Modification

The Preferred Worker Program funded \$25,000 of the \$38,000 that it cost to replace bleachers that moved out and back in by pushing an electric-controlled button. As a result, Norman can now perform this duty by himself so he isn't putting anyone else at risk

for injury by asking for assistance during his swing shift. This modification also protects all day-shift staff that must deploy and return the bleachers.

Since \$25,000 is the maximum benefit for worksite modification, the employer paid the difference for the new bleachers and provided the additional tools Norman needed to overcome the other obstacles. The employer provided long-handled cleaning tools for bathroom cleaning, a grabber-reach tool for collecting trash on the school grounds, and even eliminated the trash handling duties and the handling of equipment for lift and carry duties, such as heavy desks and art room equipment and supplies. Norman and his employer were elated with the worksite modifications because it benefits so many other staff as well. ■



New bleachers with electric deployment

What is ergonomics?

By Anthony Guidone

Ergonomics is the study of work in relation to the environment in which it is performed (the workplace) and those who perform it (workers). It is used to determine how the workplace can be designed or adapted to the worker in order to prevent a variety of health problems and to increase efficiency; in other words, to make the job fit the worker, instead of forcing the worker to conform to the job.

Ergonomics is important because more workers are suffering from backaches; neck aches; sore wrists, arms, and legs; and eyestrain. Workers suffer because they are attempting to fit or adapt themselves to the tool, equipment, or work process. In these situations, workers often have to exert too much force, adapt to awkward postures, withstand vibration and exposure to severe cold, or perform repetitive tasks that cause injuries.

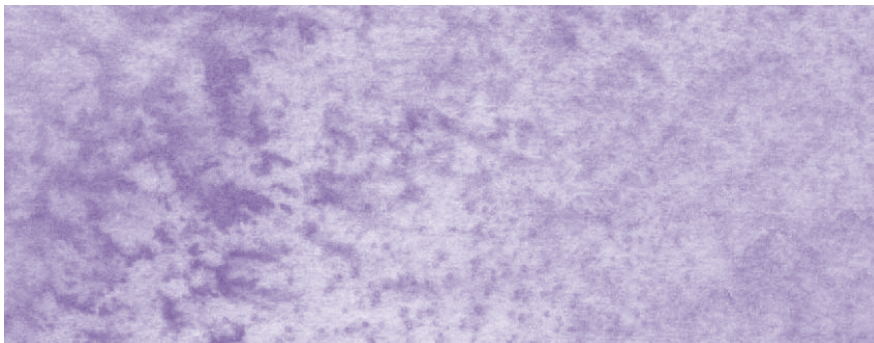
One example of an ergonomic adaptation is raising the height of a worktable to accommodate a worker's ability to reach the work. The worker and employer benefit from applying ergonomics in the workplace. The worker benefits from better health and safer working conditions. The employer benefits from fewer time-loss days and increased productivity.

Ergonomics can be used to prevent bad design from being built into a job if it is applied when a job, tools, or workstations are being set up. A worker's risk of developing musculoskeletal injuries can be greatly reduced, or even eliminated, if the worker is initially provided with properly designed hand tools. However, if a worker uses poorly designed tools, ergonomic accommodations can help correct a bad or hazardous design. Prevention is better, but accommodations can often be accomplished.

How does this apply to the Preferred Worker Program? Our consultants consider ergonomics when providing worksite modification assistance. The consultant reviews the preferred worker's permanent limitations and compares those limitations with the worker's job duties. The consultant provides modifications, which may include tools, equipment, and worksite redesign, to overcome injury-caused permanent limitations. For example, if the limitations prevent the worker from sitting for prolonged periods and the job requires eight hours of sitting at a desk, a height-adjustable desk can be provided to allow the worker to stand, as needed, while working.

Points to remember:

1. Without the application of ergonomic principles, workers are often forced to adapt themselves to poor working conditions that can result in muscular or skeletal injuries.
2. Ergonomics looks at ways to make the job fit the worker, instead of forcing the worker to fit the job.
3. Ergonomics can be used to improve poor working conditions. It can also be used to prevent bad design from being built into a job if applied when a job, tools, or workstations are being set up.
4. Ergonomics can often make a job task lighter, easier, and more comfortable. Often a worker can perform his or her job faster and longer (ultimately producing higher quality) without being injured. ■



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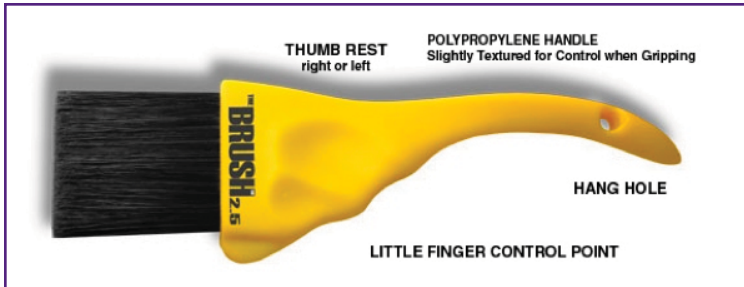


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Cool tools

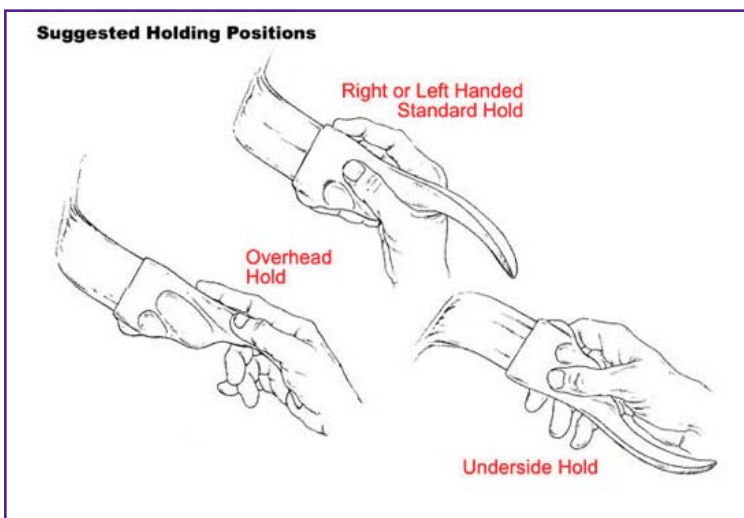
By Anthony Guidone

Cool tools, good examples of ergonomic tools: The following cool tools deal with a worker's "neutral posture" limitations, specifically if the worker has a wrist-flexion limitation. A worker could use these tools without bending his or her wrist, as traditional tools require.



Get a handle on it - \$12

This brush is the first significant design change in a paintbrush handle in hundreds of years. The unique handle design provides the painter improved control and comfort, which significantly reduces hand, forearm, and wrist fatigue. It also has a new, fresh look and natural feel that appeals to the everyday consumer.



Ergonomic angled kitchen set - \$80

The soft grip handle and right-angle design help to keep the hand and wrist in an 86-degree, stress-free neutral position, and provides a comfortable, yet firm, grip in either hand. ■



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Preferred worker benefits help workers and employers

By Kerry King

Preferred worker benefits can make tough economic times easier. How is this possible? Well, you have access to benefits that make you more desirable to hire or keep you employed, especially during these trying times. What are the benefits and how can they help you?

Premium exemption

Depending on the type of job, the immediate cost factor may or may not be a huge savings. Just like car insurance, it costs more to insure a Corvette than a Volkswagen Beetle. The same goes for employment. An employer will pay more workers' compensation premiums to insure an ironworker than a clerical position. The bigger benefit comes if an on-the-job injury occurs during the first three years of employment. The State of Oregon will reimburse the employer's insurer for all claims costs incurred with the new

claim and the employer's experience rating will not be affected by the new injury. This is a lifetime benefit you can offer to employers.

Wage subsidy

This benefit can help you get or keep a job, because it affects the employer's bottom line, which is money. We will reimburse an employer 50 percent of your gross wages earned during a 183-day period of time that you and the employer determine works best for you. You have three years to request this benefit from the time you start a job, and you have two uses of this benefit for different jobs.

Employment purchases

There are several different categories that will help you meet requirements of a job but one that stands out during these difficult economic times is worksite

creation. If an employer creates a new position for you, there is a maximum of \$5,000 to help with the cost of creating a job. We have provided help with building a new office and purchasing equipment. We can look at whatever is necessary to create a new job, and the items purchased in this category become the property of the employer.

If you present this category to an individual who is self-employed and doesn't have any employees, the business will need to obtain a workers' compensation policy first before you can start working for the business. Because you are the first and only employee, the business can apply for a discounted policy through the National Council on Compensation Insurance. If this situation presents itself, contact the Preferred Worker Program for more information. ■