

Hu-Tech Newsletter no. 10: November 2003

Welcome to our autumn 2003 newsletter. It has been a busy few months at Hu-Tech and we apologise for not getting our regular newsletter to you sooner. However, in this issue we discuss some recently published guidance on manual handling, which is likely to be included in the revised L23 due out next year; an ergonomic training pack for the off-shore industry, and the issue of health and safety of homeworkers. We have also detailed some of our up-coming training courses – ‘Ergonomics Essentials’ and ‘DSE Assessors training’.

Manual Handling Research

Earlier this year, HSE published research into the principles of good manual handling. These were launched at the Ergonomics Society Annual Conference in Edinburgh, where the authors (including Hu-Tech’s Margaret Hanson) held a workshop to discuss these issues.

The principles were developed following extensive consultation which both established the principles of good manual handling and investigated their practicability. The principles that are suggested by the research are that anyone involved in any form of manual handling should:

- think before the lift
- keep the load close to the waist
- adopt a stable position ensuring a good hold on the load
- at the start of the lift flex the hips and knees rather than the back
- ensure a good hold on the load
- avoid twisting the trunk or leaning sideways
- keep the head up when handling
- not lift or handle more than they can easily manage.

The full details of the report are available from the HSE website <http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr097.htm> The findings of the research will be included in the revised guidance to the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992, which are due to be launched in early 2004.

Offshore Ergonomics Health and Safety Training Pack

The majority of personal injuries in the offshore environment are caused by relatively minor accidents or incidents, such as slips, trips and falls and manual handling. Many such incidents could be prevented by simple ergonomic interventions which can be identified and implemented at local level. An Offshore Ergonomics Resource Pack providing a means of facilitating direct, practical ergonomic improvements at workplace level has recently been produced by Hu-Tech Associates Ltd for the Health and Safety Executive.

The resource pack provides training materials and tools to help identify ergonomic risks and to find simple, practical solutions. No previous knowledge of ergonomics is required as the pack provides a basic introduction to ergonomics and explains how it is relevant to offshore work.

The pack consists of:

- A PowerPoint presentation that can either be shown to a group of people or viewed by individuals;
- Notes and background information to support the individual or a trainer presenting the PowerPoint slides;
- Checklists for assessing risks and providing practical solutions, covering the different areas of an offshore installation.

The PowerPoint presentation is well illustrated with examples from offshore workplaces and contains the following main sections:

- What is ergonomics?
- Causes of personal injury offshore;
- Ergonomic hazard spotting;
- Typical problems and their ergonomic solutions, (covering twelve different areas/activities within the offshore workplace).

The Ergonomics resource pack should encourage offshore operators to improve the ergonomics of the offshore working environment and reduce the number of related accidents and incidents. HSE sees this material as enabling greater workforce involvement by empowering them to make their own assessments of their workplace and become more closely and proactively involved in bringing about improvements.

The Offshore ergonomics health and safety training pack has been published by HSE and is available for viewing and free downloading from the HSE web site at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/offshore.htm>.

Homeworkers: guidance on working safely at home

Homeworking is increasingly becoming a way of life for many workers. According to figures from the Work Foundation, more than one million people work at home regularly, with the benefits for the employees being, among other things, reduced commuting, improved productivity, and a better work-life balance. However, homeworkers are often overlooked in terms of health and safety, and employers face challenges in ensuring their health and safety while working (e.g. making sure the home office is suitable), the security of electronic and paper based information, and alternations in the traditional authority structures of managers.

Hu-Tech has recently worked closely with a large service provider to produce guidance on working safely at home. The company recognised the risks to health for home workers, which include the risks associated with computer work (musculoskeletal disorders, temporary visual problems and stress) as well as risks associated with lone working, driving and manual handling. To address these risks, Hu-Tech worked with the company to produce a training course and guidance document, which included employees undertaking their own DSE workstation assessment. This company also provide appropriate furniture and equipment for working at home.

Training courses

1. Ergonomics Essentials course

We were very pleased to run the 5 day Ergonomics Essentials course which follows the BOHS (British Occupational Hygiene Society) syllabus in Northampton in September 2003. Nine delegates from a range of backgrounds (including a Local Council, MoD, power supply, NHS Trust, Oxfam) attended, and we had a stimulating week discussing how ergonomics could be applied to their workplaces. We were very pleased that we had a 100% pass rate for the exam!

Delegates said:

'Well presented course from an organisation which has been involved in a variety of organisations, and therefore could provide many useful examples. The course and content were presented in an interesting manner.'

'My overall impression of the course was excellent. I would definitely recommend it to others who might wish to gain a better understanding of the basic ergonomic principles and how they apply to the workplace.'

'The course has been extremely useful and thought provoking.'

We are offering the course again in Edinburgh from 1-5th March and in Northampton from 22-26th September 2004. The cost of the course is £890 (+VAT). There is an optional exam (£80) set and marked by BOHS, successful completion of which leads to a module certificate from BOHS. Further details, including a course syllabus, provisional timetable and booking form are on our website www.hu-tech.co.uk/training-ergonomics_essentials.html Alternatively, please contact Margaret@hu-tech.co.uk (0131 718 4232) for further details.

2. IOSH - DSE Workstation assessors' course

We have applied to IOSH (Institution of Occupational Safety and Health) to run an IOSH accredited Display Screen Equipment assessors' course. We are waiting to have official confirmation of this, but are provisionally planning to run it on Tuesday 2nd and Wednesday 3rd December 2003 in London. In addition to the IOSH material which will allow delegates to undertake assessments in line with the Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992, Bill Fine, a renowned speaker from AbilityNet will be leading a session of the course. AbilityNet is a charity that specialises in alternatives to conventional computer use (e.g. voice activation, alternative mouse etc). This will be relevant for those who are assisting employees who have discomfort or disability remain within work, and we believe will add significant value to the course. The cost of the course is £475 (+ VAT). Please contact Margaret@hu-tech.co.uk (0131 718 4232) if you may be interested in attending this course, and she will let you know when the dates are confirmed.

Construction industry research

Hu-Tech has been awarded a contract from HSE to compile examples of good practice in the construction trades of bricklaying and plastering, with the aim of reducing the risk of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) in these trades. This 12 month project will involve site visits and discussions with health and safety personnel in the construction industry as to what practical measures they have taken concerning reducing the risk of MSDs, and to discuss different ways of working that may help reduce the risk. We are seeking companies that employ bricklayers or plasterers to discuss these issues with. If you are interested in finding out more, or hosting a site visit, please contact Margaret@hu-tech.co.uk

Ergonomics Society Public Lecture – by Heinz Wolff

Prof Heinz Wolff (presenter of The Great Egg Race, and Young Scientist of the Year) will be giving the Ergonomics Society Lecture in London on Thursday 13th November. In his lecture '*Risk is not just a four letter word*' he will demonstrate that the current attitude of society in relation to many forms of risk is utterly irrational, scientifically indefensible, economically damaging, and that the pre-occupation with safety dissipates a significant amount of national resource, which should be applied to more worthwhile objectives. The talk promises to be lively and possibly controversial! Entrance is free and open to the public. For further information, see the Ergonomics Society website (www.ergonomics.org.uk).

Hu-Tech news

Over the last couple of months we have completed the following pieces of work for clients:

- counter and desk risk assessment projects, and counter design modifications for Nationwide Building Society
- e-learning programme on ergonomics in manufacturing for a global pharmaceutical company
- office environment audit for Scottish Power
- presentation of ergonomics module for trainee health and safety inspectors.
- Ergonomics training for automotive parts manufacturer, and two high street banks.

If you would like any further information on any of these news items, please contact us on:

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