

## Hu-Tech Newsletter no. 11: February 2004

**Welcome to our first newsletter of 2004. In this issue we draw your attention to RSI awareness week (23-29<sup>th</sup> February), discuss some of the more pertinent topics of the day and would like to introduce two new members of Hu-Tech. We would also like to remind you of our forthcoming and very popular 'Ergonomics Essentials' training courses.**

### Campaign for short keyboards

The Ergonomics Society ([www.ergonomics.org.uk](http://www.ergonomics.org.uk)) is running an information campaign to coincide with RSI Awareness week (23-29<sup>th</sup> February), which is being organised by the RSI Association ([www.rsi.org.uk](http://www.rsi.org.uk)). In the campaign, the Ergonomics Society is seeking to raise awareness of the benefits of short keyboards for computer users. Standard keyboards with alphanumeric keys and a number pad to their right are about 450mm long. Short keyboards have the number pad and arrow keys integrated into the main keyboard, resulting in a keyboard length of about 300mm. For a right handed mouse user, this allows the mouse to be brought into a more central position, reducing the potential for shoulder discomfort that can be brought about by stretching to reach the mouse. Left handed mouse users can also benefit from the other advantage of a short keyboard, by gaining more desk space.

The benefits of short keyboards were also highlighted by Hu-Tech's Margaret Hanson in an article entitled *Not just part of the furniture* in the February issue of *Safety and Health Practitioner* (the official magazine of the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health). In it, she outlines some of the equipment choices available to organisations when trying to meet the requirements of the Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992 (amended 2002). A pdf of this article is available on our website: [www.hu-tech.co.uk](http://www.hu-tech.co.uk), reproduced with kind permission of SHP.

### Dealing with musculoskeletal problems at work

A one day conference and special one day practical workshop is being run on 9-10<sup>th</sup> March in London. The event is organised by IRS, and will explore the issues around musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) at work. Hu-Tech's Ian Randle and Margaret Hanson are both speaking at the conference, explaining the ergonomics issues to be considered when assessing risk, and giving some case studies of ways that organisations have successfully tackled MSDs. Margaret is running the morning session of the workshop on 10<sup>th</sup> March, focussing on MSD risk assessment, and including a practical exercise. For further details, visit [www.conferencesandtraining.com](http://www.conferencesandtraining.com) or call Claire Knott on 020 7347 3573.

### A cautionary tale...

A care worker working for Walsall Council in the West Midlands has successfully sued her employer after she was injured trying to use a mobile hoist to move a disabled woman in her home. It is reported that the Council failed to carry out a suitable risk assessment of the equipment that she was using.

The former auxiliary nurse suffered "strain injuries" as a result of trying to move the large hoist over carpet in the home of the virtually bed-bound patient that she was caring for. In the ruling Judge Woodward said that the use of the hoist exposed the claimant to a foreseeable risk of injury.

In commenting upon the case, Andy Nicholson, Hu-Tech director, said "this is an unfortunate instance of where the use of an aid has been accepted as a means of controlling risk without due consideration having been given to whether manual handling was actually reduced, or indeed, whether risk was increased."

## New ill-health data published

HSE has recently made available new health and safety statistics for 2002/03. The data, published in November 2003, includes the most detailed assessment yet of progress made in achieving the ambitious targets set for work-related ill health in their Revitalising targets. While there was a welcome 10% reduction in fatal accidents in the period compared with the previous year, the rate of over 3-day injuries also fell, but only by 2.4%. They report that absence due to work-related stress is rising, and that due to MSDs has remained unchanged. Over 1.1 million workers were affected by MSDs in the period; these disorders remain “by far the most commonly reported illness”. The highlights are available at [www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/overall/hssh.pdf/overpic.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/overall/hssh.pdf/overpic.htm)

## Ergonomic design

Hu-Tech continues to grow in the financial and banking sectors. In recent months we have been working on a number of design projects in the retail/network divisions of the sectors. This has involved us working alongside architects, designers, suppliers and client departments to ensure that new facilities meet both good ergonomic practice and emerging good practice in terms of access to disabled customers. Ian Randle, Hu-Tech director, who also works in the airport design sector, said “there is a growing awareness in these sectors that functionality and usability of the facilities are pre-requisites when it comes to inclusive design and good customer service”. We aim to profile some of these projects to share good practice in future newsletters.

## Training courses

Hu-Tech is pleased to run the 5-day Ergonomics Essentials course in Edinburgh from 1-5<sup>th</sup> March and in Northampton from 22-26<sup>th</sup> September 2004. The course provides a thorough introduction to ergonomics, and includes opportunity to discuss real work situations, undertake risk assessments and learn from a wealth of consultancy experience. 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](http://www.hu-tech.co.uk/training-ergonomics_essentials.html) Alternatively, please contact [margaret@hu-tech.co.uk](mailto:margaret@hu-tech.co.uk) (0131 718 4232) for further details.

## Construction industry research – can you help?

Further to the announcement in Hu-Tech's last newsletter that we have been awarded a contract from HSE to compile examples of good practice in relation to minimising MSD risk in the construction trades of bricklaying and plastering, there is a page on the HSE website profiling the research and seeking assistance with the research from construction companies. View the page at [www.hse.gov.uk/construction/hu-tech.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/hu-tech.htm).

The outcome of the research will be guidance for those involved at all levels with the design and building process from architects, designers and planners through to site managers and tradesmen. We are seeking examples of good practice in ways to reduce the MSD risks, and would love to hear from anyone with examples to share. For further information contact [margaret@hu-tech.co.uk](mailto:margaret@hu-tech.co.uk)

## Hu-Tech news

We are happy to announce that in response to a very busy previous two quarters, two new members of staff have joined the Hu-Tech team, Helen Gagg and Arran Mitchell. Helen, a qualified ergonomist, joins us from the Institute of Occupational Medicine and is a valuable asset to our very successful Occupational Ergonomics team. Arran joins as the new business development manager with a background in physiology and biomechanics.

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

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