

## Hu-Tech Newsletter no. 13: July 2004

**Welcome to our July newsletter. In this issue we look the problems associated with aircraft seat dimensions and deep vein thrombosis (DVT), and continuing with the transport theme, issues of comfort when driving. We also take this opportunity to announce some new research that Hu-Tech is undertaking on behalf of the HSE to collate case studies that demonstrate the costs and benefits of tackling MSD's. Finally we would like to inform you of our on-going programme of training courses in ergonomics and workstation assessment.**

### Hu-Tech wins HSE contract

In June Hu-Tech started work on a HSE contract called "Gathering Cost Benefit Case Studies that Support Tackling Musculoskeletal Disorders". In the 12 month project we will research, analyse, prepare and deliver 25 case studies demonstrating the costs and benefits to the company or organisation of the intervention, and the tangible health benefits to the workers. These case studies will represent a broad spectrum of industrial sectors, and will illustrate the financial and health benefits of tackling upper limb disorders and low back disorders. A few case studies demonstrating these benefits in tackling lower limb disorders will also be included.

Andy Nicholson, Project Manager for the research said "We know from our experience of working with clients in many industrial and commercial sectors, and in the public sector, that there are many good examples where ergonomic interventions have been made that have been shown to have overcome musculoskeletal problems or have reduced the risk. What we will be doing is drawing on this knowledge base to go one stage further and explore whether a cost-benefit argument can be shown for these interventions."

The Hu-Tech team includes a senior Chartered Accountant to help with this analysis. We are seeking industry partners who may have examples of good ergonomics interventions that demonstrate a benefit to staff and the business. Very little resources will be required of participating organisations since the research team has been put together to gather all of the required information.

If you would like more information about the study, or have, or know anyone who may have, suitable case studies please email Andy at [andy@hu-tech.co.uk](mailto:andy@hu-tech.co.uk) and we will be happy to discuss this further.

### Deep vein thrombosis and seat dimensions

In a Government response to a Select Committee Report on air travel and health it was noted that currently there are no standards for minimum seat pitch (the distance between a row of seats) in transport modes other than aircraft. Some work on bus and coach seating is being developed at European Union level, but this is not complete.

The CAA commissioned research into people's size and the reduction in mobility after long flights to ensure that the emergency evacuation requirements are in line with modern circumstances. The research considered the relationship between aircraft seat dimensions and passenger sizes. It has confirmed an increase in the average body size of the European population since the seating dimensions were first set. The provisional recommendations indicate a need to increase the minimum seating dimensions but the research report acknowledges that the findings must be validated before they are implemented. The CAA is seeking to encourage an early decision on the introduction of a common European standard for seat spacing.

The DfT and the CAA will also consider the scope for developing unambiguous definitions for seat dimensions for use in informing passengers of the seat size and space available on a flight.

The key issues identified are: the minimum size of seat taking account of health considerations; accommodation of passengers above average size; and proper allowance for seat-space reductions caused by the seat in front being reclined, material in seat-back pockets and fold-down tables.

As a part of the Government response the CAA set up the Aviation Health Unit in the Medical Division of the CAA Safety Regulation Group in 2003. They can be contacted for further information, on:

E-mail: [aviationhealthunit@srg.caa.co.uk](mailto:aviationhealthunit@srg.caa.co.uk)

Telephone: 01293 573700 - then press 1 for Medical and 4 for Passenger Health

## Driving comfortably

We are increasingly being asked to assess cars for drivers who are experiencing discomfort while on the road. This perhaps reflects the increased amount of driving that is undertaken for work within a wide range of businesses. These assessments have usually shown that the car used did not 'fit' the driver, either through a lack of headroom, offset pedals or a seat that was not sufficiently supportive.

With driving the risk of accidents is obvious, but perhaps less apparent is the risk of discomfort which may lead to absence or reduced performance. Driving typically involves long periods spent sitting, with limited scope to change posture. It is important to ensure that the car is suitable for the person who is using it. Unless the car offers adequate adjustment or 'fits' the driver well, drivers may experience back or neck pain, or discomfort in the legs or shoulders. Although many cars are well designed with the seat and the steering wheel offering a range of adjustments, one standard company car is unlikely to fit all users. Where the drivers are offered a wider choice, they may choose their company car for performance reasons rather than comfort, and there may be a need to raise awareness on these issues among drivers selecting company cars.

There is some useful information on this topic on the Driving Ergonomics website at Loughborough University: [http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/cd/docs\\_dandt/research/ergonomics/biw/index.htm](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/cd/docs_dandt/research/ergonomics/biw/index.htm) The site contains a downloadable pdf leaflet 'Taking the Pain out of Driving' produced by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy which can be given to employees selecting a company car. Alternatively we would be happy to assess cars or individuals who experience discomfort when driving.

## Ergonomics Training

Once again we are running the 5 day **Ergonomics Essentials (including DSE and Manual Handling)** course **on 20-24<sup>th</sup> September in Northampton**. This course follows the British Occupational Hygiene Society's (BOHS) syllabus and gives delegates confidence and practical skills in tackling ergonomics issues in their workplace. It provides a good grounding for health and safety professionals who want to know more about how to reduce ergonomics risks in their workplace. There is an optional 2 hour exam, successful completion of which leads to a module certificate from BOHS.

Further details and a booking form are available on our website [http://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).

The **IOSH 'Assessing risks for computer users'** course we ran in May was very successful, with delegates finding the course practical and useful for their work. We were very pleased that all delegates passed the IOSH exam! We are running the course again on **9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> November in London**. The course will enable delegates to become competent in undertaking DSE risk assessments as required by the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 (amended 2002). It will also include a session by Bill Fine of **AbilityNet** giving delegates familiarity and confidence in making recommendations for colleagues who may experience discomfort at work.

Further details and a booking form are available on our website: [http://www.hu-tech.co.uk/training-workstation\\_assessors.html](http://www.hu-tech.co.uk/training-workstation_assessors.html) Alternatively, please contact [margaret@hu-tech.co.uk](mailto:margaret@hu-tech.co.uk) (0131 718 4232).

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

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