

## Hu-Tech Newsletter no. 22: August 2006

Welcome to our Summer 2006 newsletter; it is slightly longer than usual as we've had a busy few months, which has borne fruit in the publication of two high profile research reports for the HSE. Many of you contributed to the 18 month study we were undertaking for HSE concerning MSD case management and rehabilitation, and we are pleased to report that the study is now complete; further information is outlined below. We've also completed the study which involved compiling case studies showing the costs and benefits of ergonomic interventions for those with MSDs. These clearly demonstrated that applying ergonomics in the workplace can be cost effective. Several of the case studies were drawn from work we had undertaken with clients; we'd be pleased to talk with you further about ways you can use ergonomics to save your business money, or help you identify the cost and benefits of ergonomic changes you have made.

### ***The costs and benefits of MSD case management and rehabilitation: report completed***

The recently completed study, led by Hu-Tech for HSE, involved an extensive literature review to identify best practice and evidence for the cost effectiveness of these approaches internationally; consultation with professionals concerning their experience and views of these programmes; and collection of data from organisations running MSD case management and rehabilitation programmes, to identify how they can work in the UK.

The study showed that there is good evidence for these programmes to be cost effective, and allowed identification of the key components of successful programmes. From this, a model was developed which outlines a cost-effective approach to MSD case management, with actions that can be taken by all stakeholders (individual, manager, healthcare provider, case manager) at different stages to help the individual stay in work or return to work.

The full report (including the model) should be available from the HSE website in mid August. A copy of the abstract and executive summary is currently available from our website ([www.hu-tech.co.uk](http://www.hu-tech.co.uk)); we will put a link from that to the full report on the HSE website when it is published.

Margaret Hanson will be speaking on the findings of the study at the following events:

- National Back Exchange (Telford, 19<sup>th</sup> Sept) more details from:  
[http://home.btconnect.com/nationalbackex/index\\_files/page0007.htm](http://home.btconnect.com/nationalbackex/index_files/page0007.htm)
- RoSPA Scotland Conference (Glasgow, 28<sup>th</sup> Sept) [www.rospace.com/scotlandcongress/index.htm](http://www.rospace.com/scotlandcongress/index.htm)
- The Ergonomics Society 'Ergonomics and Rehabilitation' conference (Liverpool, 23<sup>rd</sup> Nov)  
[www.ergonomics.org.uk/page.php?s=6&p=113](http://www.ergonomics.org.uk/page.php?s=6&p=113)

Please contact Margaret if you'd like further information about the study or assistance with setting up or running a programme ([Margaret.Hanson@hu-tech.co.uk](mailto:Margaret.Hanson@hu-tech.co.uk) Tel: 0131 718 4232)

### ***Case studies showing the costs and benefits of ergonomics interventions to tackle MSDs***

Hu-Tech has recently compiled a series of case studies for HSE which demonstrate the costs and benefits of ergonomic interventions to tackle musculoskeletal risks. The case studies include examples of workplace changes (e.g. introducing height adjustable and angled workstations for an assembly task), work method adaptations (e.g. using a helicopter to deliver materials to remote areas on large estates), and work organisation changes (e.g. reorganising team roles to avoid rushing in some jobs and waiting in others). The case studies show how ergonomic interventions (on a variety of levels) can help reduce the risk of musculoskeletal disorders in a wide range of sectors, and the financial benefits of this. A number of the case studies were drawn from our consultancy projects.

Andy Nicholson, who led the project, said “The cost to organisations of staff injury and absence can be very significant; applying ergonomics to the design of the workplace, equipment, tasks and environment is an effective way of reducing those costs. This project clearly demonstrates that ergonomic interventions can be cost effective, and make good business sense.” Andy will be presenting the findings at The Ergonomics Society ‘Ergonomics and Rehabilitation’ conference (Liverpool, 23<sup>rd</sup> Nov). Further information on this conference is available from: [www.ergonomics.org.uk/page.php?s=6&p=113](http://www.ergonomics.org.uk/page.php?s=6&p=113).

### **Better Backs 2006**

This autumn the HSE are running a national campaign in partnership with Local Authorities to tackle back pain in the workplace. Starting in October 2006, this will build on the success of the Backs! 2005 campaign. The aim is to reduce the incidence of back pain caused or made worse by work, its impact and the number of working days lost due to back pain.

The campaign will promote sensible workplace precautions that reduce the risk of back pain and emphasise the positive benefits of staying active with back pain. A particular focus of this year’s campaign will be the holistic approach needed to manage back pain, and the campaign will encourage employers and employees to work together to help people return to normal activities including work.

The findings of the two research studies described above provide useful material which can help organisations manage these issues. Please contact us if you’d like to see how we could support you in any in-house campaigns or activities you may be running in response to the HSE’s campaign.

The HSE plans to use advertising and events to raise awareness of how to reduce and manage the risk of back injury in the workplace. HSE will also undertake a programme of inspections. You can sign up for information, and take part in discussions at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/campaigns/index.htm>

### **HSE latest occupational ill health data**

If the need for the Better Backs campaign needed reinforcing, HSE has just released its detailed Self-reported Work-related Illness figures for 2004/05. Although headline figures were presented in November 2005, a copy of the full report, which provides results by a range of demographic and employment-related variables, is now available (see: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/swi/swi0405.pdf>). Among other things, the report gives estimates for the number of people in the UK suffering from MSDs, presenting figures for these relating to the back and to the upper limbs or neck, which are summarised below. These figures are broadly similar (not statistically different) to the corresponding figures collected in 2003/04 and 2001/02.

	<b>Number of people affected (1,000’s)</b>	<b>% of people ever employed who experience this</b>	<b>Number of lost working days (1,000,000’s)</b>	<b>Average number of days lost per sufferer</b>
Backs	452	1.1	4.5	17.4
UL or neck	375	0.87	4.7	21.7
All MSDs	1,012	2.3	11.6	20.5

MSDs are still the most common occupational health problem. Clearly, with over a million people in the UK experiencing an MSD which they believe to be related to their work, and the associated cost of absence resulting from this, appropriate actions to reduce the risk of development of MSDs, and management of those who have these problems, are still urgently required.

### **Documents, please!**

Hu-Tech has expanded its ergonomics design portfolio by designing a document inspection desk for use in travel terminals. During the course of 2004 our client introduced changes to their method of inspecting travel documentation. As a result, staff were now required to physically inspect all documents. This requirement, combined with the fast flow of people presenting their documents to the inspection desk, significantly changed the method of working. As a result, concerns were raised over the suitability of the existing inspection desks that were in widespread use. A comprehensive ergonomics approach was adopted to develop a design that met the full requirements of our client.

Hu-Tech undertook a number of site visits to observe the tasks and define the specification taking account of all relevant stakeholders and user groups, tasks, equipment and job aids. This information was used to develop a design which was mocked-up for initial trial and testing, before moving to a working prototype. This enabled thorough usability testing, with feedback from users, which led to a final design ready for roll out throughout the country. The integrated ergonomics approach ensured that the design met with the relevant health and safety regulations, ergonomics standards and best practice, to facilitate the safe, healthy and efficient operation of the inspectors at the desk. In particular, the desk will minimise extreme, awkward, or static postures, particularly of the head, trunk and upper limbs, and the associated risk of discomfort. The desk has been well received by users who report that it facilitates their tasks and enables them to work comfortably. You can expect to see this desk in use when travelling in the coming months!

Subsequently, Hu-Tech has been asked to assist in the design of other organisation's inspection desks.

### **Changes to the EU Machinery Directive (2006/42/EC)**

Changes have been made to the Machinery Directive to bring it up to date with current thinking and practice. The Machinery Directive provides the regulatory basis for the harmonisation of the essential health and safety requirements for machinery at EU level, and places duties on manufactures and procurers/users of machinery.

Published in the official Journal of the EU on 9 June 2006, the Directive has been quite substantially revised (see: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l\\_157/l\\_15720060609en00240086.pdf](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_157/l_15720060609en00240086.pdf)). Annex 1 to the Directive, dealing with the essential health and safety requirements relating to the design and construction of machinery, contains a new section (1.1.6) listing ergonomics requirements. It states as follows:

Under the intended conditions of use, the discomfort, fatigue and physical and psychological stress faced by the operator must be reduced to the minimum possible, taking into account ergonomic principles such as:

- Allowing for the variability of the operator's physical dimensions, strength and stamina;
- Providing enough space for movements of the parts of the operator's body
- Avoiding a machine-determined work rate;
- Avoiding monitoring that requires lengthy concentration;
- Adapting the human/machine interface to the foreseeable characteristics of the operators.

It is important to be aware of these changes when specifying and selecting machinery. Ergonomics standards are continuing to be prepared to provide a means of conformity with the Directive.

### **Ergonomics training courses**

We still have space available on our forthcoming Ergonomics training courses. These are:

- 5 day Ergonomics Essentials course on **25-29<sup>th</sup> September in Northampton.**
- 2 day IOSH DSE Workstation Assessors' training course on **5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Sept** and **14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> Nov in London.**

For further details please see our website or contact: Linda Peacock: [Linda@hu-tech.co.uk](mailto:Linda@hu-tech.co.uk) T: 01604 233 428.