

Pack it Light, Wear it Right!

The American Occupational Therapy Association named September 19 as National School Backpack Awareness Day and has scheduled community events on proper backpack ergonomics. The theme is, "Pack It Light, Wear It Right!" The events include "weigh-ins" of backpacks, and other events to raise awareness of ergonomically-sound ways to carry a school bag. Studies show an overloaded backpack forces the child to compensate by leaning forward to balance the load, creating potential health problems if the backpack is overweighted and hanging too low.

The Association points out that more than 40 million students in the United States carry school backpacks. More than 7,000 emergency room visits in 2001 were related to backpacks and book bags, and approximately half of those injuries occurred in children 5 to 14 years old.

The American Physical Therapy Association and the American Pediatric Association advise students to:

- Wear both straps. Look for padded straps when shopping for a new backpack.
- Avoid twisting and bending together at the waist. Swinging the weight to get the backpack on is a sign it is too heavy.
- Make sure the load is appropriate to the body weight. Keep the load at 10-15 percent of the child's body weight.
- Make sure the backpack is in the centre of the back. It should rest between or below the shoulder blades. It should not go below the lumbar spine.

Research on rest breaks and productivity

In the July 2007 issue of the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, researchers reported on a study in which they followed 51 workers for eight weeks to determine whether supplementary rest breaks for data-entry operators minimize discomfort and eyestrain without impairing productivity. For half of the study, participants had conventional work breaks – two of 15 minutes each per day. For the other half of the study, they had the conventional breaks plus four 5-minute breaks per day. The researchers gauged discomfort and eyestrain through responses to questionnaires, and productivity through electronically recorded measures.

The participants rated their discomfort and eyestrain significantly lower with the supplemental breaks, and their data-entry speed was found to be significantly faster with the extra breaks. The findings showed their work output was maintained even though they spent 20 extra minutes resting during the work day.

Abstract available at: <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/abstract/114265474/>

ABSTRACT

Full article can be bought (\$25) from: <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/user/accessdenied?ID=114265474&Act=2138&Code=4719&Page=/cgi-bin/fulltext/114265474/PDFSTART>

Better workplace design

An article featuring MD, Andy Nicholson was published in the online journal *Personnel Today* in May this year. The feature called "Better work by design: the workplace environment" highlighted the fact that poor workplace design cost businesses a substantial amount every year in terms of lost productivity, staff effectiveness and staff turnover. One of the key arguments in the article was that offices would function better if HR, IT and facilities managers were brought together. This approach was one favoured by Andy. "Aesthetics and practicality can be unified," he says. "The best practice approach is to collaborate with other disciplines. It's about using space. What do you have to do? And what space have you got to do it in?"

"The key players need to be brought together, and their dialogue must be ongoing, because business needs change. A key role for HR is to stress the need for continuous improvement, and to be flexible about what you have, and how you can move forward.

"Good design is important, but it's not a panacea".

The full article can be read at: <http://www.personneltoday.com/Articles/2007/05/15/40562/better-work-by-design-the-workplace-environment.html>

Free online absence management toolkit for line managers

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), working with HSE and Acas, have launched a free online toolkit to help line managers with absence management. It is aimed principally at line managers working in small and medium sized enterprises, but could also be of interest to those working in larger organisations.

Research shows that where line managers have training in absence management, there is a decrease in sickness absence rates. However, many small and medium sized enterprises provide very little or no training to line managers and therefore fail to get the benefits of effective absence management.

This toolkit provides an overview of the key issues involved in absence management, with information on practices and procedures and links to further resources. It is split into four parts to help managers:

- Identify an absence problem
- Develop an absence strategy
- Deal with short-term absence
- Deal with long-term absence

The toolkit is hosted on the CIPD website (www.cipd.co.uk/absencemanagementtool) or can be accessed via the HSE website (www.hse.gov.uk/sicknessabsence/toolkit.htm).

New Hu-Tech logo

As you may have noticed, we have a new logo! This is because of the increasing work we are carrying out in the field of Human Factors Engineering and Integration. This is primarily, but not exclusively within the oil and gas sector. An internal review identified the need to incorporate Human Factors within the logo and trading style. If you want more details on human factors, its growing importance in health and safety management, safety cases and HAZOPS etc please contact Calum Smith at calum.smith@hu-tech.co.uk.

Hu-Tech training courses

Ergonomics Essentials

We are running the 5 day Ergonomics Essentials course on **12-16th November in Birmingham (£925)**.

For further details please contact Lyn Bains: lyn.bains@hu-tech.co.uk or Tel: 01604 233 428.