



Ergonomics

Real People Real Problems Real Solutions

Small Business and Ergonomics

Fewer than 30 percent of employers with 20 or fewer employees have addressed ergonomics although more than 325,000 musculoskeletal disorders occur each year in smaller workplaces. In contrast, more than three-quarters of companies with 250 or more employees have analyzed hazards and installed some engineering controls to decrease the risk of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs).

Under OSHA's proposal, only 25 percent of general industry companies with fewer than 20 workers—1.3 million—will need to adopt basic ergonomics programs for one or more of their jobs involving manual handling or manufacturing production work. Over a ten-year period, about 1.1 million small employers will need full programs or Quick Fixes at some point because one or more of their workers will have experienced an MSD.

OSHA plans to provide extensive assistance to small businesses to assist with compliance—through publications, Internet-based materials, outreach sessions and its free consultation program. In addition, many of the provisions of the OSHA ergonomics program proposal have been designed specifically to minimize the impact on small business. For example:

- Exemption from recordkeeping requirements for businesses with 10 or fewer employees.
- An extended phase-in of requirements for job hazard analysis (2 years) and implementing permanent controls (3 years).
- Option to use Quick Fix in lieu of adopting a full ergonomics program for a problem job.
- Job-based rule rather than facility-wide coverage.
- Choice of any combination of engineering, work practice and administrative controls to fix jobs where MSDs have occurred.
- Incremental abatement option—try one control to materially reduce the hazard and wait to see if that works. Add other controls one by one if needed.



- Shortened work restriction protection period—only 6 months, compared to 18 months for lead and cadmium standards.
- Limited work restriction protection—90 percent of earnings for complete removal to retain incentive to return to work.
- Option to drop back from a full program to just maintaining controls for a job that has been fixed if no MSD occurs in that job over 3 years.