

Olympics contracts awarded and safety is underlined

The Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) has awarded the contract for the construction of the 2012 London Olympics to a consortium comprised of CH2M HILL, Laing O'Rourke and Mace to be known as the Olympic Delivery Partner (ODP).

Alan Ritchie UCATT General Secretary said: "Laing O'Rourke, a key partner in the consortium, has a track record of delivering major projects on time and on budget with a good health and safety record. The construction of Heathrow's Terminal 5 has shown that major building projects rely on a constructive relationship with the trade unions."

Jack Lemley, chairman of the ODA, had previously announced a Health, Safety and Environment (H&SE) Standard that will govern health and safety performance on projects for the London 2012 Olympics that the ODP is expected to adhere to. He said: "The ODA HS&E Standard is a key building block to ensuring the health and safety of all workers involved in constructing the Olympic venues. We want to minimise risk for construction workers, facility users and legacy maintenance staff and make the London 2012 Games healthier and safer by design."

Olympic projects will be expected to achieve a safety target of no more than one reportable incident for every million man hours worked. Unsafe practices and unhealthy working conditions will be subject to a zero-tolerance policy, and

health and safety performance will be measured against strict targets. Both the targets and performance records will be made publicly available. The ODA has also committed to a 100% CSCS skills card holder rate for workers on all sites.

In addition to safety targets, the Standard also states that all construction workers involved in the programme should be given access to health checks and help for any conditions identified. Mr Lemley added: "This Standard is as much about promoting health as it is about reducing risk and injury."

The London Hazards Centre has previously raised concerns about the safety performance of many of the companies who were allowed to bid for the Olympics contract. (see *Daily Hazard* No.89)

No-crisis management at HSE ?

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is to shed 250-350 jobs and is slowly realising it is losing money from it's budget at an alarming rate – yet the Health and Safety Commission (HSC), its over-ruling body, has only just discussed these issues.

The plans to drastically cut staffing and budgets in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have been condemned by unions representing the safety watchdog's staff. Prospect and PCS say the "crippling" cuts, which HSE chief executive Geoffrey Podger told staff are the result of budgeting blunders by the HSE board, will leave workers at greater risk.

In June Geoffrey Podger estimated the number of job losses to be 100 but this increased dramatically to between 250 and 350 in August when, in a notice to staff, he said the moves were now necessary to get back within budget. In addition to savings on staff costs, £3m will be trimmed from the publicity budget, £250,000 from policy contracts, £1m from the out-sourced Workplace Health Connect programme and £1.3m from the extra-mural science and technology budget.

HSE inspectors' union Prospect said the cutbacks come on the back of real terms cuts in HSE's budget since 2002, and in the face of "likely further cuts given the five per cent reduction target identified for its parent body, the Department of Work and Pensions, in the government's last comprehensive spending review." Prospect's

HSE branch chair Steven Kay said the cuts would result in a further drop in inspections and prosecutions, adding "any reduction in HSE staff numbers will inevitably impact on the drive to improve safety in UK workplaces. Evidence shows it is inspection backed by enforcement that is the most effective way of ensuring employers comply with their health and safety responsibilities."

Chris Hurley, branch secretary of the PCS branch in HSE, said: "My members are dismayed by the size of these cuts." She added the cuts announcement came just seven weeks after the chief executive set alarm bells ringing when he told staff he expected 'around 100 posts' would have to go. The union "is calling for a full and frank explanation of the reasons for this financial mess."

MPs lobby against incinerator

Following the government's announcement it will proceed with building a giant waste incinerator in Belvedere, John Austin, MP for Erith and Thamesmead, has laid down an Early Day Motion in Parliament condemning the decision. The decision will allow Riverside Resource Recovery Ltd to proceed with an energy from waste power station with a capacity of 72 megawatts, at Norman Road, Belvedere, South East London.

There has been a 16 year campaign by local residents against the incinerator. Their campaign has said that such a highly populated area is unsuitable for this type of facility which will burn London's waste. Their concern has been the risk to the health of local residents and local environment from emissions from the incinerator, high levels of greenhouse gas emissions and the safety of the residue left after combustion.

Mr Austin also states in the EDM the decision to go ahead with the plant has been taken before the government has finalised its review on its waste strategy and actually contributes to greenhouse gas emissions when the government says it wants to reduce them. Campaigners

have also said the focus should be on recycling rather than burying in landfill or by incineration.

So far 33 MPs have signed the Early Day Motion (see below). Council leader Councillor Ian Clement has announced his Conservative council has teamed up with London's Labour Mayor, Ken Livingstone, to apply for a judicial review of the decision to give the project the go-ahead. Campaign group Bexley And Districts Against Incinerator Risks (BADAIR) this move and there has also been a petition with over 5,000 signatures sent to the Prime Minister.

▲ <http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=31177&SESSION=875>

Printers fined for polluting river

Capital Print and Display Ltd, of Marshgate Lane, Stratford have been found guilty of polluting the Pudding Mill River, a tributary of the River Lee in Stratford, with a mixture of industrial solvents and fined £5,000.

Stratford Magistrates' Court heard how the river turned a milky white colour and gave off a putrid smell, prompting a number of concerned members of the public to contact the Environment Agency.

Following a joint investigation with Thames Water, the Environment Agency found drainage gulleys from screen cleaning equipment connected to the surface water drain at Capital Print. These gulleys had been flushing a cocktail of solvent-based cleaning agents, solvent-based inks and curing agents directly into the river.

Investigating officer Iain Regan said: "The responsible course of action would have been to pay for the waste to be tankered off site and disposed of correctly – or secure a trade effluent consent from Thames Water for the waste to be treated at a sewage works."

Rogue scrapyards fined

A persistent environmental offender and his company have been fined for pollution offences.

Company director Steven Thompson, admitted four offences relating to the processing of hazardous waste and was fined £24,000. Redcorn Ltd of White Hart Lane, Tottenham admitted an additional three offences and was fined £22,000 with £4,000 costs.

Redcorn Ltd had ignored repeated warnings from the Environment Agency to fix its deficient drainage system which was causing oil and hazardous car fluids to build up at the site and leak into neighbouring properties. The Environment Agency first warned the company it was flouting the rules in 2003. After a visit in April 2005, a formal compliance notice was issued, but two months later it was discovered that Redcorn had ignored the advice and its licence was suspended.

The Environment Agency's investigating officer Iain Regan said: "By failing to comply with the requirements of its waste management licence, operating while its licence was suspended, conducting its business in a manner which could have caused pollution, and subsequently ignoring our advice, this company has found itself hauled before the courts and rightly handed a heavy fine."

Thames Water tops pollution list

Thames Water was fined more than any other firm in England and Wales for pollution last year, the Environment Agency has said.

The company, which received penalties totalling £128,000, was joined by other water giants Southern, Severn Trent and United Utilities in the top 10 list.

In July, Thames Water was again fined £12,000 and ordered to pay £2,000 costs

for discharging sewage into the Pymmes Brook, East Barnet, killing more than 100 fish.

And things are not looking as though they will be better this year as they recently pleaded guilty to polluting a stretch of the Dagenham Brook in a densely populated area of Walthamstow, East London, with raw sewage. A fleet of tankers worked for three days to remove the sewage from the river at two locations, Orient Way and New Spitalfields Market, in Leyton. The case has been referred to Snaresbrook Crown Court for sentencing.

Action to stop injuries to food workers

Following two recent incidents where workers have lost fingers while working at Katsouris Fresh Foods, Park Royal, the GMB union has launched a campaign for safety improvements. They have organised a public meeting locally at the Brent Indian Association and say they will be considering organising protests not only at Katsouris but also at some of its customers premises. Katsouris employs 2,500 in its three Park Royal sites making ready meals for major retailers such as Tesco, Marks and Spencer, Sainsbury and Waitrose.

GMB say their member Dimple Muit lost the top of the middle finger of her right hand while using a machine that she had already reported as faulty. They also say her suffering was compounded when her Katsouris manager refused to call an ambulance, offering her nothing but tissues to staunch the flow of blood from

her damaged hand. They say when she was finally taken to hospital by car she was left by herself outside the A&E unit bleeding heavily from her injured hand and holding a plastic bag containing her injured finger in the other. The delay meant that her finger could not be re-attached. GMB say Dimple will be off work for eight to ten weeks and is in constant pain.

Shortly after Dimple's accident her work colleague Nitin Chokshi suffered an accident at the Katsouris site where a large rubbish bin fell severing the tops of two of his fingers of his left hand. GMB has lodged personal injury claims for both injured members.

GMB has written to the Health and Safety Executive demanding action against the company which has been served with seven improvement notices in recent years with what they say is no visible improvement in the safety

Hiten Vaidya, GMB Health & Safety expert said: "Getting compensation for people injured by Katsouris is not the point. No one should go to work fit and health and leave it injured. Both these accidents



Injured Katsouris worker Dimple Muit

were avoidable. The company has to clean up its health and safety record which is just unacceptable. It has a duty in law to provide a safe working environment and it is clearly failing to do so. The HSE that is supposed to enforce safety in the workplace have been worse than useless. It is time for them to come on board with us and sort this company out."

Previous *Daily Hazard* article on Katsouris workers www.lhc.org.uk/members/pubs/newslet/81dhc.htm

Official safety inspections "in freefall"

A recent report shows the major workplace accident rate has increased as Health and Safety Executive (HSE) safety inspections, prosecutions, convictions, notices and contact time with firms have all plummeted.

The Hazards magazine 'Come Clean' report (see below) predicted the announcement of widespread funding and job cuts in HSE, and warns that inspections are "in freefall". Figures obtained by Hazards show the provisional 2005/06 inspections figure for its frontline Field Operations Division (FOD) has reached a record low, down from 55,195 in 2004/05 to just 46,032. This is almost 40 per cent lower than the corresponding figure for 2001/02.

At the same time the number of workplaces enforced by HSE has risen dramatically, up from 525,841 in 2001/02 to 598,385 in 2004/05 with a corresponding impact on the frequency a workplace can expect to see an HSE inspector. It says in 2001/02 that would suggest a workplace inspection frequency of once every 7 years. By 2004/05 this had dropped by over a third to barely once every 11 years. In 2006, this is set to dip below once every 13 years.

The report says since HSE introduced its new "enforcement-lite" strategy in 2003/04, Britain has seen a leap in fatal and major injury rates. In the three years from 2000/01 to 2002/03, the reported fatal and major injuries rate for employees hovered around the 111 injuries per 100,000 workers mark. In 2003/04 it broke 121. HSE provisional figures for

2004/05 put it at above 118. The report says: "HSE is facing a deepening crisis, with workplace inspections hitting a new low and HSE inspectors rapidly becoming an endangered species." It adds: "Money and adequate staffing is the solution. Without it, HSE is all washed up."

'Come clean – HSE faces a funding and enforcement crisis: Hundreds of jobs to go', *Hazards magazine*, Number 95, July-September 2006. Full online report. See also, Hazards "does this look like a success story to you?" graphs on HSE's recent enforcement performance.

www.hazards.org/commissionimpossible/comeclean.htm

Hazards "Commission impossible" webpages www.hazards.org/commissionimpossible/index.htm

Asbestos – good news and very bad news

The good news is the government has acted to ensure people with the fatal asbestos cancer, mesothelioma, are fully compensated, reversing a previous decision that limited many compensation payments to a percentage of the actual amount awarded.

The very bad news is that the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) has pushed through a weakening of the current asbestos regulations, despite not having the agreement of the trade union side of the HSC and loud objections from asbestos disease victims, campaigners, unions and MPs.

The decision limiting compensation payments was made at the House of Lords earlier this year. It rejected the long established rules where those employers found to have negligently exposed a worker to asbestos bore all the cost, even when there were some gaps in the employment and exposure record or in the employers' liability insurance cover. The government move ensures workers will receive the full payout.

The case was shamefully taken by the employers and their insurers trying to limit how much money they would have to pay out and the only way to change the Lords decision was by parliament passing a new law. The Lords decision was widely felt to be wrong footed, favouring



Protesters outside the HSC as the decision to weaken legal asbestos controls was taken.

those that contributed to the injury rather than the injured, even provoking comment from the Prime Minister who promised action (see *Daily Hazard* No.89). That happened when the government's compensation bill passed through both house in parliament becoming law in July.

Praising the government, TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: "While no amount of compensation will ever make up for the loss of a loved one from this dreadful disease, at least those who do make a successful claim against an employer will know that any settlement will not be reduced because one or more of their previous employers cannot be traced".

Events at the HSC in July took a turn in the other direction when it's Chair, Bill Callaghan, pushed through a change to

the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations that will remove the current requirement for a licence to work on textured coatings containing asbestos, commonly known as "artex".

This issue has been the cause of a long, heated debate as to whether this move would reduce worker protection. The HSC asked the question in a consultative document last year where the greater majority of answers came back saying they should not reduce the licensing requirement. Clearly this did not suit those on the HSC, including Bill Callaghan, who wanted to remove the licensing requirements. They tried to side step those consulted's opinion by saying more information was required before the decision could be taken and got the

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to do a specialist scientific report. This report was proclaimed by those on the HSC as the proof they needed, saying the risk from Artex was so small that it didn't require a licence.

These moves have been roundly criticised by the trade union side of the HSC and campaigners outside, saying the licensing requirements should be strengthened, not weakened, and the scientific report bore no relation to the real circumstances at work where people would be exposed. TUC commissioners expressed concern with the research, in particular its failure to cover sanding of artex. Even with this omission, the report showed that mean asbestos exposures were approaching the proposed limit, with HSE just indicating it was 'unlikely' the limit would be breached. During the spring and summer 121 MPs signed an Early Day Motion in parliament trying to stop the HSC but they refused to listen.

The HSC allowed Bill Callaghan to push this change through without the agreement of a third of its members. The HSC is meant to operate by consensus, that is general agreement of its members. The three trade union members made it explicit at the meeting they could not agree to the weakening but Bill Callaghan pushed the issue through as if it was agreed. The HSC is not meant to operate on majority voting and this was the first time in memory of the Chair pushing an issue through in this manner. Normally, if an issue does not reach consensus it would fall and the status quo would be maintained, in this case the licensing

requirement should have remained on the statute books.

Unions have expressed their dismay at the decision and anger at the way it was been taken. Amicus Health and Safety Officer Rob Miguel said: "We agree that overall the revisions to the asbestos Regulations increase worker protection, but we do not agree with this relaxation on textured coatings. Even if the risk from textured coatings is small, it's still a risk, and with something as deadly as asbestos we cannot afford to take any risks. It is ironic that the HSC made this final decision on the same day that Royal Assent was given to the Compensation Bill which reversed another flawed decision on asbestos, this time by the House of Lords."

John McClean, National Health & Safety Officer for GMB said: "GMB feel that an opportunity to send out a positive message on the control of asbestos at work to the industry has been missed. However by removing Textured Coatings from the licensing regime GMB has grave concerns for the future well being of existing, and in particular, new workers the asbestos industry."

Members of the construction section of the South East Region TUC (SERTUC) have expressed anger at the decision and particularly the way the trade union side's views were pushed aside.

The proposals for the revision of the asbestos regulations now have to go to parliament where a campaign to reverse the reduced licensing requirements decision has already started. There is an all-party parliamentary sub-committee on asbestos chaired by Mick Clapham MP that has already taken the issue up.

Mysterious asbestos death

Lillian Doughty of Plaistow died from mesothelioma, the asbestos caused exclusively by asbestos exposure but an inquest into her death failed to identify where she may have been exposed.

Lillian was 79 at the time of her death in September 2005 and at the inquest in July 2006 it was revealed she lived in a "pre-fab" in Stratford. These pre-fabricated homes were part of the emergency housing provision after the blitz of London in the Second World War and were meant to be a temporary solution. They had a high asbestos content and became a permanent temporary solution in that many were still occupied in the 60's and to a lesser extent through to the 1980's. Lillian's husband George gave evidence to the hearing.

Coroner Dr Elizabeth Stearns said she had dealt with two suspected cases of mesothelioma a week when she was practising doctor in east London. She concluded Mrs Doughty had died of pneumonia caused by mesothelioma but could not establish where she had been exposed to asbestos

Police and Barnet Council face charges over boys deaths

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has laid charges against two police bodies and Barnet Council over the deaths of two boys in a swimming pool at Hendon police college in July 2002.

Gameli Akuklu, 14, and William Kadama, 15, were participating in a summer play scheme that involved a swimming activity at the Police College when they drowned. A recent trial of PC Daniel Phillips, who was supervising at the time, found him not guilty of manslaughter and after the jury could not decide if he was guilty of health and safety charges they were dropped.

The London Borough of Barnet, the Office of the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis and the Metropolitan Police Authority will all face charges under the Health and Safety at Work Act for failing to ensure the safety of the boys.

Royal Mail and Romec fined after worker death

The Royal Mail and one of its contractors have been fined a total of £250,000 after an engineer fell to his death at a sorting office

Romec employee Ian Dicker, 47, a married man who lived in NW8, was working on the main roof of the West London Mail Centre, by Paddington station, in July 2003 when he fell about 30 feet through a fragile skylight and into a corridor below.

Both the Royal Mail and Romec pleaded guilty to breaches of the Health and Safety at Work Act after being prosecuted by Westminster City Council following a lengthy investigation. Mr Dicker was supervising an apprentice who was working next to a skylight which was not marked as being dangerous. The apprentice was fixing an infrared light on the roof when Mr Dicker stepped forward to inspect his work and fell through the skylight. There was no safety rail or boarding to prevent someone falling.

Romec admitted they failed to ensure that the systems they laid down on paper for safe working were put into practice by their employees and were fined £100,000 with costs of nearly £22,000.

The Royal Mail admitted they failed to ensure the fragile rooflights at the sorting office were properly identified by signs and did not install a protective barrier round them and were fined £150,000 and ordered to pay the prosecution's costs of nearly £25,000.

Councillor Audrey Lewis, Westminster's Cabinet Member for Community Protection, said: "While I am pleased that our prosecution has been successful, if the Royal Mail and Romec had taken more care then Mr Dicker might be alive today."

The Communications Workers Union's National Health and Safety Officer Dave Joyce said: "Although the union is pleased with this outcome, this fine is less than 1/2% of Royal Mail's £355m operating profit on a turnover of £9bn. This case

clearly illustrates why we need a new corporate manslaughter offence on the statute books and reinforces the case for more stringent health and safety duties on directors with penalties for those who neglect safety standards to such an extent that they lead to deaths like this. I only hope this conviction gives some consolation to Ian's relatives and that the penalty sends a warning to Romec and Royal Mail to think again about putting profit before safety."

Refugee and Migrant (RaM) Workers in London

City Parochial Foundation (CPF), because of immanent changes to their funding priorities, are unable to continue funding LHC's work with refugee and migrant workers but needless to say, despite the lack of money the work doesn't go away.

The raw statistics of our work from September 2005 to June 2006 are in the table below:

2005

Month	Advice & guidance	Training groups	Publicity & media	Work with other orgs
Sept	12	1	1,910	5
Oct	16	1	1,750	8
Nov	14	1	4	6
Dec	17		160	4

2006

Month	Advice & guidance	Training groups	Publicity & media	Work with other orgs
Jan	12	1	2	5
Feb	21	1	2,000	7
Mar	13	3	160	12
Apr	18	2	2,000	14
May	22	1	4	11
Jun	25	2	160	9

Advice and guidance is labour intensive with a single inquiry taking anything from 2 hours to 2 days for research and advice. The figures for advice and guidance include both individual inquiries and inquiries originating from groups. Group

based inquiries made up 27% of all inquiries. Individual's inquired about injuries at work arising from manual handling tasks, asbestos exposure, chemical exposure, laundry hazards and electrical (including display screen equipment hazards). All the group based inquiries were associated with the home environment. e.g. A group of West African refugee families had been housed in East London in flats known to be contaminated with asbestos and a group of Brazilian migrant families were beset with vermin (rats and cockroaches).

Over the year there was a gradual increase in the take up of the projects service. In response to question about why they made use of the project 42% had found out via the website, 19% by word of mouth, 22% from trade union sources and the remainder were referrals from other London based voluntary organisations.

We know that the web-site was an effective way of publicising the service because in addition to 42% of the Advice and Guidance service users indicating that as their first point of contact other organisations, the media (television, radio) and a London Borough refugee and migrant (business start-up) support unit found out about our services via this route.

Service users were predominantly able-bodied men. All the home safety enquiries were made by women and 12% of the workplace inquiries were made by women. Only one inquirer self-identified as being disabled.

LHC supporters scheme

If your organisation needs regular health and safety support (inspections, audits, risk assessment or training) then becoming an LHC supporter will be a useful and money saving scheme for you. You pay £495 pound annual subscription and for this you can have the services of one of our workers for a day in the following year. Additionally if you need other LHC services in the year you get 10% off our normal service rates.

Sign up as an LHC supporter and get workplace health and safety support.

USING THE
CENTRE

Training

COURSE PROGRAMME

The Centre runs one-day courses aimed at trade union safety representatives and voluntary/public sector organisations. Courses cost £55 per person and are held at the Red Cross building near the Angel, Islington which is fully accessible.

Our training is activity based and the timetable is from 10am to 4pm. Our current programme includes:

▲ Introduction to Workplace Health and Safety

Thursday 12th October 2006

▲ Introduction to Risk Assessment

Tuesday 17th October 2006

▲ Introduction to Workplace Health and Safety

Thursday 9th November 2006

▲ Introduction to Risk Assessment

Tuesday 16th November 2006

Details and booking forms at www.lhc.org.uk or from the Centre advice line 020 7794 5999.

COURSES TO ORDER

We run tailor made courses on a range of health and safety topics for unions, charities, community groups and councils. Contact us to discuss training for your organisation or workplace.

SUPPORT FOR COMPANIES

If your organisation needs regular health and safety support we have an annual subscription scheme that provides a discounted daily fee for scheme members.

London Hazards Advice Line

We aim especially to work with local groups such as tenants/residents organisations, black and minority ethnic networks, union branches. We'll provide the level of support you need, from a single phone call to long-term support for a local campaign.

020 7794 5999

ERGONOMICS

Ergonomics is the study of the relationship between people and their work environment. It is used to prevent or reduce workplace ill-health and accidents.

Disability campaigners have always advocated that people are not "disabled", people are simply different and it is the environment that disables. Ergonomics takes the same line.

Ergonomic factors are important to the risk assessment process and are central to any "suitable and sufficient" risk assessment.

There are many ways that people interact with, and within, their work environment and all that range of interactions are ergonomic factors the risk assessment must cover.

Definition

In August 2000 The Council of the International Ergonomics Association adopted a "definition" of the discipline (the science of ergonomics). The definition says that ergonomics has these "domains":

Physical ergonomics which relates to physical activity, such as, working posture, repetitive movement, WRULDs, manual handling, workplace design, workload and pace of work.

Cognitive ergonomics is about our mental processes, mental workload, human-computer interaction, work stress, training, decision making and skill levels.

Organizational ergonomics is about organisational structures, policies and processes, for example, communication, human resource management, working hours, systems of work, home-working (or tele-working) and quality management.

Hazardous practice

Any work done in awkward postures, at excessive speed or with excessive effort will result fatigue and discomfort. These factors result in damage to tendons, ligaments, muscles, spinal cartilage,

nerves, and blood vessels; commonly referred to as musculoskeletal disorders. And because ergonomics is about the relationship between a worker and their work, a person's susceptibility to injury will vary because of differences in age, physique, stature, gender, mental capacity etc.

An ergonomically sound job will not injure or stress the worker or make a job more likely to result in accidents.

Hazardous factors, in addition to the well documented ones of posture, repetitive motion, contact stress and vibration, that are properly the subject of an ergonomic approach to risk assessment are:

- ▲ workplace layout
- ▲ workstation design
- ▲ workplace environment
- ▲ tools and equipment
- ▲ personal comfort.

Workplace layout

Workplace lay-out is often unplanned and haphazard. The "It is like that because that's where the power points are" syndrome. In a workplace were no thought has been given to ergonomics, needless journeys are made, people have bruises on their shins, work in the dark, have bumps on their head and can't hear what's being said to them. They have an unsafe system of work.

Jobs should be designed to minimise stair journeys, ensure easy access to workstations, have comprehensible communication whether aural or visual, have ease of access to storage etc. The workplace should fit the tasks that are carried out in it and workers must not fill the hap-hazardous gap between "task" and "fit for purpose".

Workstation design

When the law refers to a workstation it is not simply meaning a computer workstation. A toolmakers bench, a checkout operators till-point, a telephone support workers desk and a place on an assembly line are all workstations and workstations must be designed to "fit" workers rather than workers having to

adopt postures to use the workstation. e.g. BBC journalists are negotiating with their employer regarding the design of editing suites.

Workstation environment

Temperature variations have an effect on our bodies, high temperatures will increase the rate at which we will fatigue. Cold temperatures decrease blood flow and so affects muscle strength, and dexterity.

Light levels in a workplace may be too dark or too bright for the job to be done safely. This and other lighting factors, i.e. flicker, may cause eye strain or worse.

Humidity levels are important. If too dry body surface fluids quickly evaporate and cause "dry eye" and "dry skin" causing discomfort which is intrusive. This may lead to lack of concentration and increase the possibility of personal error. There is also the increased chance of infection in these circumstances. If too wet, perspiration does not evaporate and leads to "slippery grip", This discomfort is also intrusive into concentration.

Ventilation (filtration, air quality and air movement), noise and, for outdoor workers, weather conditions are also subject of to ergonomic assessment.

Tools and equipment

Tools that span between the handles e.g. pliers or cutters, or bulky barrelled tools, such as some grease guns must be avoided. Spans above 2 inches must not be used if hand pressure has to be applied. Tools that need workers to apply rotational force with a bent wrist should not be used. These can be replaced with ergonomically designed tools or power tools.

Equipment control panels must be "fail safe" (even if the worker gets it wrong no detriment occurs). Switches and control layouts must be easily understood and all switches, control buttons and display information must be easily accessible when the worker has a comfortable working position.

Computer software comes into this category too. Probation officers successfully

negotiated an ergonomic analysis of case recording software.

Personal comfort

Discomfort at work can be physical or emotional; experiencing either will precipitate an increase in workplace stress. Discomfort at work is a sure indicator that a risk assessment should be carried out or reviewed. In this circumstance an ergonomic analysis must be part of the risk assessment.

Basic ergonomic check-list

- ▲ Are you satisfied with how you do your job tasks?
- ▲ Are your co-workers satisfied with those tasks too?
- ▲ Can you see and hear all that you need to do your job?
- ▲ Do you understand the information you are presented with while doing your job?
- ▲ When something goes wrong at work is it put right simply?
- ▲ Do you have aches, pains or discomfort when you have been doing your job?
- ▲ Can you suggest improvements to the way your job is currently done?
- ▲ Are your colleagues of a similar opinion?
- ▲ Are there high levels of sickness among people doing your job?

Ergonomics and risk assessment

There will be occasions when workers need to insist that a professional ergonomist do an analysis but simply involving workers in job and workstation design will often do the trick.

In the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, the Approved Code Of Practice (ACOP), paragraph 15 to Regulation 3 (duty of employer to

carry out risk assessments) says: "The risk assessment process needs to be practical and take account of the views of employees and their safety representatives who will have practical knowledge to contribute".

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in their publication "Understanding ergonomics at work" (INDG90(rev2)) identify the following work hazards as needing ergonomic assessment at the core of the risk assessment.

- ▲ All work involving display screen equipment (not just computer workstations)
- ▲ All work involving manual handling
- ▲ All work that generates work-stress, including:
 - work demands that are too high (or too low).
 - workers having no say in how their job is organised
 - poor management support
 - conflicting demands e.g. High productivity and quality.

It also emphasises that shift scheduling, overtime and work breaks (including breaks between work shifts) and the home (life) – work balance should be seen as matters of ergonomic analysis.

The HSE says: "these problems may lead to tiredness or exhaustion, which can increase the likelihood of accidents and ill-health."

The law

Section 2(2) of the Health and Safety at Work Act requires "the provision and maintenance of plant and **systems of work** that are, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe and without risks to health."

The Management of Health and Safety at Work regulations require employers do "suitable and sufficient" risk assessments on all aspects of health and safety that may affect their employees' health, safety or welfare.

Improvements to work should be made. Where it applies, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 requires "reasonable adjustments" are made to help injured workers work, although this should be general practice by employers whether the DDA applies or not. Alternative work should be made available where necessary to help prevent further injury. Advice on alternative work equipment that might help fulfil the "reasonable adjustments" requirement can be sought from the Dept. of Work and Pensions "Access to work" scheme.

If none of the above can be achieved then rest away from work may be the only solution. Dismissal of those injured should definitely not occur and could lead to the employer getting in trouble with the law, having to pay compensation. If all else fails and it is appropriate, early retirement on medical grounds may be in the employee's best interests and can be explored.

Safety reps should negotiate an RSI prevention policy covering the above.

Further information

- 1) International Ergonomics Association
www.iea.cc/ergonomics
- 2) Ergonomics in Australia
www.ergonomics.com.au/pages/400_useful_info/720_useful_links.htm
- 3) HSE
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg90.pdf#search=%22understanding%20ergonomics%20at%20work%22
- 4) Hazards Magazine
www.hazards.org/haz75/voodooscience.htm
- 5) Chartered Institute of Building Service Engineers (for standards on the built environment)
www.cibse.org/

Factsheets online www.lhc.org.uk London advice 020 7794 5999



Hampstead Town Hall Centre
213 Haverstock Hill, London NW3 4QP
Tel: 020 7794 5999 Fax: 020 7794 4702
Email: mail@lhc.org.uk Website: www.lhc.org.uk
Registered Charity No. 293677

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