

North Carolina Department of Labor
Division of Occupational Safety and Health
Raleigh, North Carolina

Field Information System
SN/OPN

Operational Procedure
Notice #108

Subject: Cooperative Assessment Program for Ergonomics

A. Purpose. This OPN establishes and implements a Cooperative Assessment Program (CAP) for Ergonomics available to employers committed to reducing to the extent feasible ergonomic hazards in their workplaces. This program including performance monitoring will be managed through the Bureau of Health Compliance.

B. Scope. This OPN applies statewide to any employer subject to the North Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Act.

C. Discussion. Cumulative Trauma Disorders (CTDs) are the fastest growing injury and illness in North Carolina yet they are some of the most under reported. Currently there are no standards for the elimination of ergonomic stressors in the workplace. The intervention strategies developed by OSHNC as reflected in implemented settlement agreements have been very successful in reducing the incidence rate and severity of CTDs and attendant worker's compensation costs in previously cited facilities. Employers who have implemented these strategies, which include employee involvement, have experienced enhanced employee morale, productivity and retention rates.

Enforcement action for ergonomic stressors is very time consuming and resource intensive for all involved. Historically it has taken two to three years from the time an ergonomic enforcement action is initiated until a final resolution. By making a CAP available to employers without an enforcement action, employees whose employers take advantage of this program will experience improved working conditions much faster than if enforcement action had occurred and OSHNC will be able to achieve much broader success in reducing occupational CTDs for the resources available.

D. Objectives.

1. Prevent the occurrence and severity of CTDs among North Carolina workers; thereby reducing their pain and suffering.
2. Encourage employers to implement comprehensive ergonomic programs that feasibly seek to eliminate or reduce the occurrence and severity of occupational CTDs and thereby provide safer workplaces for affected employees.
3. Reduce the costs of ergonomic deficiencies in the workplace - through reducing lost work day

rates, reducing workers' compensation costs, and improving the overall productivity and competitiveness of NC industries and services.

4. Provide a comprehensive mechanism to assist employers in the development and implementation of ergonomic solutions.
5. Utilize limited OSHNC resources more efficiently to maximize employer compliance with their legal duty to maintain a workplace that is free from recognized hazards.

E. Program Description.

1. After an assessment has been made by the Bureau of Health Compliance, a CAP may be offered to any employer who does not have a pending ergonomic citation or active ergonomic settlement agreement provided that the employer demonstrates a strong commitment to address their ergonomic problems in good faith.
2. CAPs will be implemented through the signing of an agreement between the employer and OSHNC (see appendix) which will set forth the actions that the employer must take, a time frame for completion of each task, and the commitment for OSHNC to monitor compliance with the agreement. Authorized employee representatives may participate in the negotiation of a CAP at the discretion of the Director. If a collective bargaining agreement exists, the collective bargaining agent will participate in the negotiation of the CAP.
3. Notwithstanding the existence of an ergonomic CAP agreement, OSHNC will respond to complaints, including ergonomic complaints, and take all other enforcement actions consistent with existing policies and protocols. If a citation is pending, the citation should be resolved utilizing an ergonomic settlement agreement.

F. IMIS Coding. The OSHA-1 form for all monitoring activities conducted pursuant to this OPN shall be coded as N 03 ergonomics in block 42

May 2, 1996

Date



Charles N. Jeffress
Director