

Materials Safety

A Message from Rick Kelly

Recognize New Ergonomic Hazards When Your Work Changes

Relatively small and apparently innocuous changes in work can lead to new hazards and serious injuries.

Recently, a Division staff scientist developed a serious and painful ergonomic injury due, in part, to an increase of computer use. His pain and disability continues despite physical therapy. Changes in computer use are common when researchers spend more time writing articles, preparing presentations and completing dissertations.

Other injuries involve use of lab equipment. A couple of years ago, a student suffered a very severe ergonomic injury due to an increase in physical work-load after the departure of a co-worker. Working on a large vacuum system, he repeatedly removed and reinstalled hundreds of bolts using hand tools. In addition, he performed a great deal of fine manipulative work under a binocular microscope. His injury required months of physical and electrical stimulation therapy and his disability was substantial.



The take-home message here is:

1. Make a conscious effort to recognize when even minor changes in work may introduce new hazards.
2. Report physical pain related to cumulative trauma (ergonomic pain) immediately.

