

**Loss Control Services – 5 Minute Safety Topic**

**Ergonomic Solutions at Low Cost**

Ouch—those repetitive stress injuries hurt, not only the worker, but the corporate pocketbook as well. A typical employer can pay between \$35,000 to \$75,000 for a single carpal tunnel case. If surgery doesn't cure it, the payout can reach \$150,000 to \$200,000 – most of this in medical costs.

Does that mean you need to throw money at the problem with expensive high-tech gadgets? Not necessarily, say the experts. Using new, "ergonomically correct" equipment, like special computer keyboards and chairs, doesn't work for everyone and it can cost a bundle.

Simple and inexpensive changes can include adjusting the height of chairs and computer monitors, providing foot rests and wrist rests, if needed, and adjusting lighting to prevent glare.

Train, train, train: While high-tech solutions look appealing, the best investment an employer can make is to train everyone adequately. Employees should be taught the factors that cause repetitive motion injuries—such as physical exertion, stress, vibration, and cold. Training new employees is even more successful because they learn to avoid bad habits from the start.

If an injury does occur, it is best to take a step-by-step approach. First, cut back on repetitive work to give hands and wrists a chance to rest. Prescribed anti-inflammatory drugs and wrist splints may provide some relief. Most physicians consider surgery as the last resort.

Knowing too much? Some employers fear that by instituting an ergonomics program, they will be hit with a deluge of claims from workers armed with knowledge about repetitive injuries. While it is true that, in the first year of a program, a company will see more claims as affected employees seek treatment, by the third year of the program, the payoff will begin. The more severe cases will have been taken care of, and the new cases coming in will be uncovered before more serious injury occurs. Health experts emphasize that treatment at this point can be more effective and less costly than one case of full-blown carpal tunnel syndrome.

