



Ergonomics: ErgoNet: An Ergonomics Network

Scott Schneider Column Editor

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ErgoNet: An Ergonomics Network

Scott Schneider, Column Editor

Editor's Note: In February 1994, Mike Blotzer reviewed the many electronic bulletin boards available that can be valuable to industrial hygienists in his "IH Interface" column. One bulletin board that was not mentioned, however, is ErgoNet run by the University of Michigan. It is a valuable place for discussions on a wide range of topics. Reprinted here is an article by Chris Grant from the March 1994 issue (Vol. 37, #3) of the *Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Bulletin* which describes ErgoNet and how to access it. I look forward to "seeing" you on the Net.

ErgoNet, a computer-based communication forum, started as a pilot project of the University of Michigan's Center for Ergonomics. It allows networking among ergonomics practitioners and researchers on a wide variety of topics. Currently 100 users regularly communicate through the system, which can be accessed via any modem capable of making a local phone call.

The idea for ErgoNet arose during University of Michigan occupational ergonomics courses as a result of the valuable information that was exchanged in lectures and at breaks. Participants wanted that information to be available to a wider audience and felt electronic conferencing would be the ideal medium.

Feedback from the original test group (former course attendees) indicated that the network fulfilled its goals: allowing practitioners to share information, helping them to avoid "reinventing wheels," fostering discussion of policy and management as well

as content issues, and injecting research-based information into practice.

Any number of topics can be under discussion simultaneously, and discussions are kept separate so that there is less confusion than with a conventional bulletin board. Discussions can be any length, and old discussions can be easily found and retrieved. The following is a partial list of topics discussed on ErgoNet during the pilot phase.

Where to get ergonomic information: Recommendations and sources for CD-ROM databases; journals.

Ergonomic tools: Opinions on ergonomics training tapes, motion analysis systems, computerized NIOSH lifting guidelines programs, computerized ergonomics evaluations, neurometers, biofeedback devices.

OSHA regulations: Whether a recurrence should be recorded as a new incident, what constitutes "symptom-free," how OSHA views waiting periods before recording, implications of the Pepperidge Farm OSHA ruling.

Other OSHA topics: Opinions on the OSHA Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on ergonomics standards, opinions on certification of ergonomists, sources for and opinions about the new NIOSH lifting guidelines, opinions on the Occupational Safety and Health Reform Act.

Requests for research information on hazards: Bent necks during computer use, users of drafting tables, laundry workers, 911 operators, use of bifocals in offices, mice and trackballs, electromagnetic fields, tire warehouse workers, agriculture workers, construction workers, foundry workers, woodwind instruments, syringe filling, long-distance driving, safe limits for keying, microscope users, shoveling, bar code scanning guns, spray painting, cake decorating.

Searching for facts: Tool control button and trigger pressure thresholds, tarsal tunnel syndrome, whether cumulative trauma disorders can occur after only a few weeks of exposure, the efficacy of warm-up or stretching programs, productivity effects of making left-handed workers use their right hands, ganglionic cysts, whether grip strength loss can indicate carpal tunnel syndrome, lifting limits for walking up stairs, cumulative trauma disorder statistics in the United States compared with other countries, cost of lost or restricted workdays.

Management issues: Getting management to take ergonomics programs seriously, cost-benefit analysis of ergonomics, the Toyota Sewing System, the Norwegian study of the benefits of ergonomics programs and interventions, perception of ergonomics by manufacturing engineers.

Vibration: General information on vibration, sources and information about vibration-reducing truck seats, gloves, and so on.

Searching for product sources: Phone headsets, thermal protection gloves, "ergonomically designed" tools in general, mechanical force gauges, tools for moving office cubicles.

Sharing experiences and research citations on new, novel, or questionable items: Kneeling chairs, backward-sloping keyboards, back supports, wrist braces, computer glasses, below-the-counter VDT tables, wrist rests, phone shoulder rests, knee braces.

Symptom surveys and preplacement exams: When and how people are using them, whether they cause worker apprehension or increased reports.

Ergonomics awareness training: Comparing different approaches at different companies—subject matter, length, methods, timing.

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The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is seeking applications for the Chief of the Exposure Assessment Branch (EAB) within the newly created Health Effects Laboratory Division. The purpose of EAB is to develop and establish new and innovative programs which examine the toxic effects of workplace airborne particulates and chemical, physical and biological agents and exposures. This position supervises a group of the following specialized areas: toxicology, microbiology, industrial hygiene, chemistry, etc. This program has national and international effect in that it deals with occupational hazards found in virtually all facets of employment within the United States and abroad.

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In 1993 ErgoNet received funding from AT&T, NCR, and the Center for Office Technology to increase the number of participants and to absorb phone and computer charges; however, a one-time \$50 fee is required to set up the account. Those interested in participating should send their name

and address to Chris Grant, Center for Ergonomics, University of Michigan, 121 IOE Bldg, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2117; 313/994-0066, fax 313/994-0579.

Editorial Note: Scott Schneider, CIH, is the Ergonomics Program Director

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