

# Ergonomic Workstations: It's Not a One-Size-Fits-All Approach



BY KATIE KUEHNER-HEBERT

**N**umerous options exist for ergonomic workstations, but there are also numerous keys to selecting the proper equipment to the job, said Rob Beightol, director of marketing at MHI member Gorbel. Finding those right keys was one of the goals at a webinar held in November by MHI Industry Group Ergonomic Assist Systems and Equipment (EASE), which addressed how companies can most effectively set up ergonomic workstations for the protection of their workers.

“It is not a one-size-fits-all approach, as most systems can be developed based on the exact work being performed,” said Beightol, who was one of the presenters at the webinar. “Additionally, it is normally not just one product, but a system of products that when used together provide maximum ergonomic benefits.”

It is important to consider things like the overall space required to do the work, what activities – such as bending, lifting or reaching – may cause the most strain on the worker, as well as the individual workers required to use the systems, he said.

“These types of activities cost business in all industries each year, and choosing the proper ergonomic solution may alleviate costs associated with lost time, workers’ compensation claims and healthcare claims,” Beightol said. “Some systems also allow workers to be more productive due to the reduction in manual activities or reducing those actions that are essentially wasted effort.”

Systems can involve everything from adjustable desks and chairs, to lift tables and platforms to intelligent lifting devices that can be programmed for the exact load being lifted, he said.

“These products can all work together to provide an environment that eases the strain on the worker, especially in the areas of back, shoulder and neck fatigue,” Beightol said.

The webinar also covered the ways in which ergonomic solutions can not only protect their workers, but could impact overall efficiency of their operation if all of the essential factors are considered when selecting a system, he said.

“By concentrating on the exact work being performed and the reduction in functions that could cause strain on the worker, companies can have a ‘win-win’ when it comes to providing solutions that offer great benefits to the workers while simultaneously increasing efficiency,” Beightol said.

In the webinar, Rob Doucette, applications engineer at MHI member BOSTONtec, explained, step-by step, how to plan and set up ergonomic work environments using work stations and different types of useful accessories. He also shared essential design strategies

and how to identify different reach zones to help improve work processes.

“In today’s competitive global business environment, it becomes increasingly important for firms to maintain and improve quality, accuracy and productivity throughout their operations,” said Doucette. “While automation has made great advances, many tasks still remain that are being performed by human operators. Often these tasks are the more difficult and repetitive ones. Designing a work environment for today’s diverse workforce that reduces repetitive motions, awkward postures and heavy lifting is an essential factor in reducing operator strain and injury.”

It is also essential when trying to fill open positions. “Finding and retaining workers for repetitive tasks is becoming increasingly difficult for companies,”



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**“While automation has made great advances, many tasks still remain that are being performed by human operators. Often, these tasks are the more difficult and repetitive ones.”**

—Rob Doucette, BOSTONtec

said Nina Neuschuetz, marketing manager for BOSTONtec. “In the United States we are experiencing a tight labor market, and employee retention is a major success factor in highly competitive markets like online fulfillment and material handling. Designing ergonomic work environments will deliver a significant return on investment by reducing employee turnover, fatigue, workplace-related injury, and maximize productivity, accuracy and quality.”

At its core, ergonomics is the science of fitting the task to the worker, not the worker to the task, Doucette said.

“By taking time to plan the work process and environment, operator comfort

and productivity can be significantly improved,” he said. “Diversity in the workforce has made the one-size-fits-all approach to designing a work environment obsolete. The ‘average’ worker does not exist.”

EASE is the group within MHI focused solely on making work easier for people by improving the work environment.

“The mission of the Ergonomic Assist Systems and Equipment (“Council”) is to broadly promote the benefits of ergonomic assist systems and equipment together with the advantages derived from, and the considerations for, the use of this equipment in the workplace,” the group writes on the MHI website.

“It is also the mission of the Council to promote the general safety and health aspects of work environments for people with or in the vicinity of mechanical equipment.”

The group’s objectives are to engage in the industry conversation about ergonomics, particularly where it can suggest available solutions provided by member companies; and to serve as a resource to the academic, governmental and industrial communities for solutions to ergonomic challenges that provide better human results and increased productivity.

EASE members promote the practice of good ergonomics in the workplace by providing solutions across a broad spectrum of applications and industries. Activities include presentations at various industry events and development of non-commercial training materials. EASE also engages and collaborates with NIOSH and the academic community to enrich the group and enhance presentations and training materials.

To learn more, visit [mhi.org/ease](http://mhi.org/ease). ●



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