

# UC Monthly Safety Spotlight, April 2012

## UCOP Ergonomics Working Group

### UCOP Working Group Promotes Ergonomics that Safeguard Employee Health and Safety

Each campus or medical center has its own culture and personality. In terms of safety and risk management, powerful allies stand behind their individual programs and initiatives. Coordinated by the UC Office of the President (UCOP), working groups made up of experts from throughout the system unify and share program ideas that are applicable to all UC facilities.

In the constantly evolving science of ergonomics, the UCOP Ergonomics Working Group serves as a clearinghouse of information, program models and other resources. The Working Group membership of 25 to 30 subject matter experts draws the entire UC system. Members meet every other month via phone conference to review issues and opportunities for improvement.

Through step-by-step analysis, research and consultation, they develop practical programs for departments and units to use in day-to-day operations. "Our goal is to recommend measures that are straightforward and easy to implement, so that supervisors and managers can quickly and efficiently use them," says Kristie Elton, Ergonomics Specialist at UC Riverside and Co-Chair of the Working Group. "We help employees build long term strength into their ergonomic standards and practices."

"We are working to standardize programs and practices as much as possible across the system," Elton adds; "That way all employees receive the best information, and we are able to control expenses, which is to everyone's advantage." The Working Group also advocates strongly for inclusion of ergonomic principles in the earliest stages of facilities planning.

As an example of their organizational process, the Working Group recently spearheaded a project to review positions with the highest risk of injury or illness, recommend ergonomic products and design guidelines for the tasks performed by people in those positions. In June 2011, the Working Group introduced a comprehensive injury reduction plan for custodial staff.

Other areas benefiting from the Working Group's attention and assistance include dining services, maintenance, animal care and grounds keeping operations. "Employees in these areas need up-to-date information, education and training, and specific products to ensure proper ergonomics," says Elton. "Among our highest priorities are consistent communications so people are well informed, and training programs that integrate safe ergonomic principles into day-to-day operations. We help campus leaders identify and understand sources of high risk from musculoskeletal injury and give them the tools to offset those risks."

Through the Ergonomics Working Group, the UCOP can arrange for some funding for implementation of qualifying training programs or product introductions that improve individual department or unit ergonomics.

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Among the best practices the Working Group promotes is the use of interactive online computer ergonomics software that office employees can use to evaluate their ergonomic needs. Using the software tools, employees who use a computer for three or more hours a day should perform a work station self-assessment and receive recommendations for physical adjustments to their work spaces and other injury prevention measures. The program also provides direct assistance, such as advice to join the walking program or pop-up messages reminding employees to get up and stretch, with frequency determined by the amount of active computer use.

“The software clarifies what employees can do, including how they are positioned, work practices, training requirements, and so on,” says Elton. “If there are still any ergonomic issues after the employee follows the recommended actions, he or she can contact their EH&S ergonomics office or Occupational Health office for more assistance.”

The interactive software features a dashboard that delivers progress reports to ergonomics programs. “The statistics tell us a lot,” says Elton; “For instance, since we introduced the program, there has been an 87% decrease in risk at our location. This is significant because reduced risk will eventually result in reduced cost as well as employee injury, because each risk may take years to manifest into a reportable injury.”

Elton encourages all employees to talk to their supervisors or safety coordinators about proper ergonomics for their specific job tasks. “Even a small risk of injury should be addressed as soon as possible, before an injury takes place,” she says; “Get to know your UC EH&S or Occupational Health professionals, and take advantage of online resources. The UCOP Ergonomics Working Group is working for you, but you have the most control over making proper ergonomics a routine part of your workday.”

For more on the UCOP Ergonomics Working Group and other system-wide working groups, click on <http://ucanr.org/sites/ucehs/Workgroups/Ergonomics/>