The Safety & Health Advisor
Spring 2020

ATLANTIC CHARTER
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Ergonomics When Working From Home

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many office workers are now working remotely. Creating areas in the home to achieve work efficiency and minimize ergonomic risks can be a significant challenge given that some employees only have laptop computers without external accessories, limited work areas, and few furniture options. Thinking about where to set up your remote workstation is important to avoid musculoskeletal problems such as neck, upper and lower back, wrists, and eye strains.

For many people their workstation at home may be the kitchen table, dining room, or some other unused area where there is a suitable table and chair. Regardless of where the work area is located, it's important to have a chair with a padded seat and backrest which provides adequate lumbar support along with a table or work surface that will allow you to keep or hands at about elbow height with your arms resting comfortably along your sides.

Typically non-adjustable chairs around the home are too low for most people which can create shoulder abduction (arms too far away from your sides), excessive wrist flexion as well as contact stress on the forearms. They also lack adequate seat pan padding and back rest support and are just not designed to be used all day.

Ideally you should get an adjustable office chair that provides all day comfort and support. If you don't have an adjustable chair, one solution is to place a firm cushion on the chair seat and back rest. This will raise you up so that the keyboard height is about the same height (or slightly lower) as your elbow height which keeps your shoulders, elbows, and wrists in a neutral position.

However, for some people this can create a new problem where their feet may no longer reach the floor.

If this occurs you will need to use a footrest to support your feet, which in turn relieves pressure on the back, knees, and legs and improves blood circulation. Plastic storage bins turned upside down, shoe boxes, or books can all be used as an effective footrest.

Need an Ergonomics Assessment?

No Problem! Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Atlantic Charter Safety and Health Service Team is delivering our consulting services remotely. We can perform workstation assessments for your employees by conducting a short interview and reviewing several photos supplied to us of the person working at their computer or work area from different angles. After assessing this information, we will make recommendations for simple improvements to the work area, along with recommendations for integrating micro-breaks into the work day and other suggestions to minimize fatigue and discomfort.

Our remote ergonomics evaluations and assessments can be performed for both teleworkers and onsite employees. Contact your Safety and Health Consultant for additional details and schedule an assessment!

Laptop/Keyboard – Mouse Positioning

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Laptops are lightweight and portable so they can be used about anywhere. However, due to their compact design with the keyboard and screen connected it creates an ergonomic tradeoff between poor neck/head posture and poor hand/wrist posture. When the screen is raised up to establish a neutral neck posture, the keyboard is too high for the hands and wrists which causes excessive wrist flexion.

Likewise, if the keyboard height is optimized, the monitor height then becomes too low causing excessive neck flexion.

Ideally, you should use an external monitor, keyboard and mouse and position the monitor and keyboard directly in front of you. The keyboard should be close enough so that you are not reaching out (elbows should be at about 90 degrees). The monitor should be no more than a hands distance away. The top of the screen should be at about the same height as your eyes as you are looking straight ahead (slightly lower if your wear bi-focals).

The laptop can be placed books or reams of paper along if you don't have a height adjustable external monitor.

Micro Breaks

Movement (such as shifting your posture in your chair) is critical throughout the day for reducing fatigue due to sustained static muscle loading. Micro-breaks are less than two minutes in duration to allow time change postures and promote blood flow by standing up, stretching, or possibly doing a different work task like making a phone call). A micro-break isn't necessarily a break from work, but it's a break from using the same set of muscles all day long.

Ergonomics Tips Summary

- An adjustable office chair with a sturdy five point base and appropriate seat pan and back rest is a must for daily telecommuting from home. Adjust your chair seat pad so that your thighs are about parallel relative to the floor. Hard or unpadded seat pans are uncomfortable to sit on for more than an hour as they create too much contact pressure. Soft, deeply padded seat pans can also cause you to sink in too far and shift pressure from the buttocks to surrounding tissues resulting in tension in the hip muscles. When sitting with your lower back in contact with the backrest you should have about 2 or 3 inches of clearance between the back of your knees and the front edge of the seat pan for proper support.
- Pull in your chair (or move keyboard closer) so you're not typing/mousing with your arm(s) extended out too far in front of you. Your elbows should be close to your body and bent at an angle between 90 and 120 degrees. Your wrists should be at a neutral angle (straight). If your feet can no longer touch the floor – get a shoe box or plastic container to support your feet.
- Your mouse should be positioned alongside the keyboard to reduce the need to reach and lean your body during use.

Tips For Preventing Eyestrain (Mayo Clinic)

Computer use is a common cause of eyestrain. If you work at a desk and use a computer, these self-care steps can help take some of the strain off your eyes.

- Blink often to refresh your eyes. Many people blink less than usual when working at a computer, which can contribute to dry eyes.
- Blinking produces tears that moisten and refresh your eyes. Try to make it a habit to blink more often when looking at a monitor.
- Take eye breaks. Throughout the day, give your eyes a break by looking away from your monitor. Try the 20-20-20 rule: Every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds.
- Bright lighting and too much glare can strain your eyes and make it difficult to see objects on your monitor. The worst problems are generally from sources above or behind you, including fluorescent lighting and sunlight. Consider turning off some or all of the overhead lights.
- If you need light for writing or reading, use an adjustable desk lamp. Close blinds or shades, and avoid placing your monitor directly in front of a window or white wall. Place an anti-glare cover over the screen.
- Adjust your monitor. Position your monitor directly in front of you about an arm's length away so that the top of the screen is at or just below eye level. It helps to have a chair you can adjust too.

Laptop Ergonomics Resources and Self Assessments

http://wisha-training.lni.wa.gov/training/articulate/officeergonomics/story_html5.html

https://www.ors.od.nih.gov/sr/dohs/Documents/Computer%20Workstation%20Ergonomics%20Self%20Assessment%20Checklist.pdf

https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations/checklist.html

Telecommuting Safety

Thousands of employees are adjusting to working from home as businesses, institutions, and organizations across the region promote social distancing. Telecommuting, as it is called, provides an opportunity for employees to carry out essential functions for their employers, while minimizing the spread of the COVID-19 virus. However, telecommuting may be a new venture for many, resulting in a lack considerations for safety.

Prior to the 2020 COVID-19 breakout, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLA) has reported that 29% of Americans work from home. This percentage has seen a recent dramatic increase, and many employees may be ill-prepared for this adjustment. While work offices often have ergonomic chairs and equipment, access to ergonomic assessments, and other safety training & education, home work environments may be sorely lacking.

Employees who find themselves working from home would be well advised to exercise due diligence in identifying potential hazards they may encounter. What happens when the kitchen counter or dining room table becomes the work station?

Ergonomic self-assessments are a good place to start to assure that the workstation is designed and adjusted properly. Workstations lacking ergonomic considerations can lead to increased stress, resulting in injury.

Thought should also be made towards identifying additional potential hazards within the home. This quick list has items that should be examined.

General Safety

1. Is the workstation arranged to be comfortable without unnecessary strain on backs, arms, necks, etc.?

2. Are heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems adequate for assigned tasks and in good repair?

3. Is the lighting adequate for assigned tasks?

4. Are cabinets, shelves or furniture greater than five feet high secured to prevent toppling?

5. Are books and supplies stored to prevent falling?

6. Are wheels on rolling files or other mobile equipment free from binding when rolled? Can they also be locked to prevent rolling?

7. Are cords, cables or other items arranged to prevent a tripping hazard?

Fire Safety

1. Are fire exits clearly defined and unobstructed?

2. Is there a charged and accessible dry chemical fire extinguisher?

3. Is there a working smoke detector covering the designated workspace?

4. Is the workspace kept clean from trash or other combustible materials?

Electrical Safety

1. Are all electrical plugs, cords, panels and receptacles in good condition and free of exposed conductors or broken insulation?

2. Are circuit breakers or fuse panels properly labeled and accessible?

3. Are three-wire grounded outlets or circuit breaker power strips used?

4. If using a portable heater, check that it:

- Is located at least three (3) feet from combustible materials;

- Has a seal of a nationally recognized testing agency , such as UL;

- Is stable, and not placed where it could tip over, and;

- Is in good working order, with no smell or sparks when in use.

Additional information and resources are available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, through this link:

https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/officeenvironment/default.html

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COVID-19 – OSHA Recordkeeping

Under the new guidance, most employers are now exempt from the requirement to record COVID-19 cases of employees for OSHA recordkeeping purposes, absent of objective evidence that a case is work-related. However, employers that are in the healthcare industry, emergency response organizations, and correctional institutions, however, must continue to record work-related COVID-19 cases. The guidance will take effect immediately and will remain in effect until further notice, pending the conclusion of the COVID-19 public health crisis.

See OSHA Memorandum, *Enforcement Guidance for Recording Cases of 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) on OSHA Injury and Illness Logs*, April 10, 2020, (www.osha.gov/memos/2020-04-10/enforcement-guidance-recording-cases-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19).

Employers are responsible for recording cases of COVID-19 if all of the following requirements are met:

- The case is a confirmed case of COVID-19, as defined by the CDC;

- The case is ***work-related***, as defined by 29 CFR § 1904.5; and

- The case involves one or more of the recording criteria set forth in 29 CFR § 1904.7 (*e.g.*, medical treatment, days away from work).

Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has provided interim safety practice guidance for critical infrastructure workers. These include personnel working in 16 different sectors of work, including:

- Federal, state, & local law enforcement

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- 911 call center employees

- Fusion Center employees

- Hazardous material responders from government and the private sector

- **Janitorial staff and other custodial staff**

- **Workers – including contracted vendors – in food and agriculture, critical manufacturing, informational technology, transportation, energy and government facilities**

To ensure continuity of operations of essential functions, CDC advises that critical infrastructure workers may be permitted to continue work following potential exposure to COVID-19, provided they remain asymptomatic and additional precautions are implemented to protect them and the community.

A potential exposure means being a household contact or having close contact within 6 feet of an individual with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. The timeframe for having contact with an individual includes the period of time of 48 hours before the individual became symptomatic.

Critical Infrastructure workers who have had an exposure but remain asymptomatic should adhere to the following practices prior to and during their work shift:

- **Pre-Screen:** Employers should measure the employee's temperature and assess symptoms prior to them starting work. Ideally, temperature checks should happen before the individual enters the facility.

- **Regular Monitoring:** As long as the employee doesn't have a temperature or symptoms, they should self-monitor under the supervision of their employer's occupational health program.

- **Wear a Mask:** The employee should wear a face mask at all times while in the workplace for 14 days after last exposure. Employers can issue facemasks or can approve employees' supplied cloth face coverings in the event of shortages.

- **Social Distance:** The employee should maintain 6 feet and practice social distancing as work duties permit in the workplace.

- **Disinfect and Clean work spaces:** Clean and disinfect all areas such as offices, bathrooms, common areas, shared electronic equipment routinely.

Additional Considerations

- Employees should not share headsets or other objects that are near mouth or nose.

- Employers should increase the frequency of cleaning commonly touched surfaces.

- Employees and employers should consider pilot testing the use of face masks to ensure they do not interfere with work assignments.

- Employers should work with facility maintenance staff to increase air exchanges in room.

- Employees should physically distance when they take breaks together. Stagger breaks and don't congregate in the break room, and don't share food or utensils.

Follow this link for the full information:

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html?deliveryName=USCDC_2067-DM25522

COVID-19 and Mental Health

Did you know that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that depression and anxiety cost the global economy $1 trillion annually? The WHO also estimates that every $1 invested into "treatment for common mental disorders" will return $4 in improved health and productivity. The outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has certainly been stressful for employees and their families. Fear about this disease, especially due to its uncertainty, can be overwhelming and lead to anxiety and depression.

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Communication and support from senior leadership is critical during this period. Listen to a podcast at https://lnkd.in/epZcr7n about "Leadership's Role in Workplace Mental Health: Inspiring a Collective Mindset of Care." In the recent Forbes article, Mental Health In The Workplace: Leading In The COVID-19 Context, the author identified three ways leaders can support the mental well-being of their employees during this pandemic and beyond.

The CDC's website has some important tips on coping with stress which include:

- **Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories**, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.

- **Take care of your body**.

  o Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate.

  o Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals.

  o Exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep.

  o Avoid alcohol and drugs.

- **Make time to unwind**. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.

- **Connect with others**. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.

In addition to the CDC's website link, the following are some additional mental health resources pertaining to COVID19.
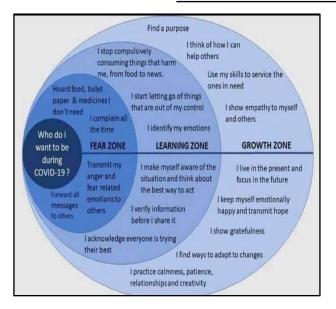
➢ Managing Stress and Anxiety (*Centers for Disease Control - CDC*)

➢ How to #BeTheDifference For People With Mental Health Concerns During COVID-19 (*Mental Health First Aid*)

➢ Mental Health And COVID-19 – Information And Resources (*Mental Health America*)

➢ COVID-19 RESOURCES (*Workplace Wellness Council of Massachusetts*)

➢ Mental Health and COVID-19: Taking Care of Yourself and Your Loved Ones (*Podcast by Tony Piro, MSW - Emerson Hospital*)

The Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) is sharing tips to help individuals control their own behavior during heightened stress and anxiety. The five tips everyone can use include:

1. **Understand that Behavior is Communication:** Most communication occurs beyond the words we use. Look for signs of anxiety in body language, tone and cadence. Understand that crisis behavior reflects a need and consider what it is the other person might want.

2. **Avoid the Power Struggle:** No one can meet every need at every moment. Challenging or exercising authority over a person can escalate negative behaviors. Considering options you can offer allows flexibility to address both parties' needs and desired outcomes.

3. Use Limit Setting: Behavior can't be forced but setting limits can help us influence behaviors. Framing acceptable behaviors or outcomes can encourage the other person to choose the most productive option.

4. **Practice Rational Detachment:** Don't take behaviors personally. Stay calm. Find a positive way to release the negative energy you absorbed during the conflict. Keep in mind, you can only control your own attitude and actions.

5. **Therapeutic Rapport**: Learn from the conflict and help the other person learn from the experience. Focus on identifying and preventing the pattern of behavior in the future. Finally, put time and effort into repairing the relationship.

A safety colleague recently posted the following visual on the Community Dashboard on the American Society of Safety Professionals' website (courtesy of *Patrick Nelson – Loyalty Point Leadership – www.loyaltypointleadership.com*)

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Hopefully, we can glean some self-help tips from the 'Learning Zone' and 'Growth Zone' to help us stay out of the 'Fear Zone'. Stay safe and healthy!

FREE - Online Safety Committee Training

Organization's that operate a safety committee, whether required by regulation or not, may use a new online training resource for their committee member's offered by Oregon OSHA.

Oregon OSHA recently created a webpage that offers free access to courses such as "Safety Meetings and Committees", "Accident Investigation" and "Hazard Identification".

These can be used by any worker wanting to know more about safety committee's or by committee members themselves to supplement their knowledge and help them perform their committee duties.

The State of New Hampshire regulation addressing Joint Loss Management Committee's specifically indicates that the members must be trained on hazard identification and accident investigation, so this resource would be especially beneficial for NH locations for either initial or re-training purposes for committee members.

The materials are available in both English and Spanish and may be accessed at:
www.osha.oregon.gov/edu/courses/Pages/safety-committee-suite.aspx

Amputations – OSHA National Emphasis Program

Effective December 10, 2019 OSHA updated its National Emphasis Program (NEP) for amputations in manufacturing industries to "identify and reduce or eliminate" amputation-related hazards. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 5,920 amputation injuries occurred among U.S. private-sector employees in 2018.

NEP revisions include:

- Coding requirements for agency amputation inspections in the OSHA database.

- Targeting methodology to include data from the amputation reporting requirement under OSHA's incident reporting standard.

- Removes two appendices from the previous NEP, which expired at the end of this past fiscal year, and adds appendices on amputations targeting methodology and covered North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes.

"Operating machinery or equipment can be extremely dangerous when it is not properly guarded or maintained," OSHA states. "Injuries involving machinery or equipment often result in death or permanent disability. OSHA's enforcement history shows that employees performing servicing and maintenance on machinery or equipment are often injured when no machine guarding is present. OSHA workplace requirements prescribe measures for the safe operation, servicing, and/or maintenance of machinery and equipment."

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OSHA regional and area offices will provide education and prevention outreach to qualifying industries during the first 90 days of the program, as required under the NEP and begin enforcement after March 10, 2020.

OSHA has also published a guide #3170 called _Safeguarding Equipment and Protecting Employees from Amputations_ to help workplaces especially small businesses that typically do not have the necessary resources to address workplace safety needs.

The OSHA guide identifies eight mechanical motions and eight hazardous actions that present possible amputation hazards. The guide also sets forth steps employers can take to reduce these hazards.

The material in _Safeguarding Equipment and Protecting Employees from Amputations_ is appropriate for anyone responsible for the operation, servicing, and care of machines or equipment -- employers, employees, safety professionals and industrial hygienists. Topics covered include hazard analysis, safeguarding machinery, awareness devices and hazardous energy (lockout/tagout).

If you need assistance in evaluating your ergonomics or safety and health program, please contact Neal Freedman, John Cotnam, Mark Hickox or Rick Muller from Atlantic Charter's Safety and Health Department at (617) 488-6500.