

ARAMARK Success Story: Ergonomics Pilot Gets Employees Involved

Headquartered in Philadelphia, ARAMARK is a professional services giant, providing food services, facilities management and uniform apparel to health care institutions, schools, stadiums, and businesses around the world. With approximately 250,000 employees working in a variety of settings, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) were becoming a serious issue. In 2007 and 2008, one in five injuries was a MSD leading to over one third of annual workers compensation costs.

At ARAMARK's Refreshment Services, which provides coffee service, water filtration, and break-room essentials to more than 100,000 locations throughout North America, MSDs are the number one reason for lost-time claims. For this reason, the company chose two of its facilities (in New York and Minnesota) to pilot their new ergoTEC process.

"The ergoTEC process was developed because MSDs are a major loss driver across ARAMARK," explains Mike Lavery, Manager of Strategic Programs for Safety and Risk Control. ErgoTEC is short for Ergonomic Targeted Exposure Control. The process is designed to target the major causes of MSDs and implement solutions that will have the greatest impact across all of the business units. The ergoTEC approach can be summarized in six key elements:

1. Site Manager and Supervisor Training
2. Hourly Employee Training
3. Site Assessments
4. Action Planning and Implementation of Changes
5. Observations and Feedback
6. Employee Involvement

For the Refreshment Services pilot, a focus team looked at those groups heavily involved with the movement of product, including warehouse workers, route drivers, and service technicians, as they had the highest number of injuries. After data collection and workplace risk assessments were completed, a list of recommendations was developed based on ergonomics risk reduction criteria. The team then refined the recommendations through additional criteria including employee approval, effect on operational efficiency, and whether or not the improvement could be scaled-up across the enterprise.

The pilot activities were designed to achieve rapid implementation of recommendations while simultaneously transferring the skills necessary to sustain the ergoTEC process at the site level. The improvements that made the largest impact at the sites were often as simple as fixing casters on carts and adding grab bars to delivery trucks. In an effort to implement ergoTEC business-wide, Refreshment Services will hold training sessions across the country for all general managers and safety leaders at their market centers. The training will include internalizing the skills and tools to complete site assessments, conduct behavior observations, and implement the high impact recommendations from the pilot activities.

Key Learnings

Participation and involvement with frontline employees is essential. Discussing problems and allowing employees to drive the best recommendations forward is the key to acceptance of the ergonomics process. As Bill Budzyn, General Manager from Roseville Vending in Minnesota notes, "The way this program was designed allowed our frontline employees to be a part of each step. This was not a program that was simply forced upon our team; instead it was developed with the opinions of our team."

Start with the "low-hanging fruit". A general manager from the Syosett Market Center explains, "There isn't always a direct relationship between investment and benefit. Some of the simplest and least expensive changes have the most impact such as using electric screwdrivers, changing work heights, and refurbishing existing equipment."

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