



## Ergonomics; Job Analyses

“Great milk comes from happy cows. Happy cows come from California.”

By Dan Zahlis

I am not an expert on the quality of milk – or the happiness of cows – but I do understand the point being made by the California Milk Advisory Board in their “happy cows” advertising campaign. Great products are created by happy “producers” working in comfortable environments.

When it comes to workplace comfort, employees often are the engineers of their own happiness.

While participating in formal ergonomic reviews, I worked with engineers who had “ergonomist” on their business cards and regulators with a penchant for detailed anthropometric data and complex formulas. But these formal ergonomic analyses typically ignore the red flags waving throughout the workplace: employees’ self-crafted solutions to deal with fatigue and discomfort. For example, many employees turn to the mystical properties of duct tape, and a company’s recycling bin, to improve their personal working environments. Duct tape and cardboard become the “low-hanging fruit” of many ergonomic programs.

Compounding these oversights is the fact that these self-crafted solutions never seem to appear on a hazard list, even though they spawn directly from someone’s pain or discomfort. Perhaps these feats of ingenuity are considered “problems solved,” but I have never found them on a hazard control list either. Don’t get me wrong, the employee inventors enjoy pride of accomplishment, but I have yet to speak with one that considered the issue to be satisfactorily abated. I am not sure how ANSI would classify these control methods.

Active Agenda doesn’t have an “Ergonomics” module, because a comfortable workplace is the product of many elements, the most important of which is communication. Instead, Active Agenda utilizes a variety of modules to assist companies with the implementation of an effective ergonomics

program.

Active Agenda tracks and trends injuries and illnesses at all levels of severity and it automates the OSHA Recordkeeping forms. It tracks suggestions made to improve working conditions, and trust accounts created to support employee solutions. It captures hazard reports, and it records control methods. The system also is capable of generating employee questionnaires and symptom surveys. The closest thing Active Agenda has to an “Ergonomics” module is the Job Analysis module, but it’s the combined power of recording, empowering, asking and listening (with your eyes too), that generates the best results.

The Job Analysis module is used to record observations of job hazards and controls at the task level. The system captures task observations (e.g. operating forklift in dry warehouse), job hazards (e.g. worn backrest on forklift), and controls that are specific to a particular job assignment (e.g. cardboard and tube sock lumbar support taped into backrest). Each hazard control can be associated with protective equipment, use instructions, and requirements. The module also allows an organization to build a list of general hazards and controls that can be incorporated into multiple job analyses, thereby reducing substantial work flow redundancy.

The Job Analyses module also enables the assignment of general activities (i.e. bending, crawling, climbing, kneeling, etc.) and specific job characteristics such as hand use (type, frequency, and duration), lifting (weight, height, frequency and duration) and carrying (weight, distance, frequency and duration).

California is not just famous for happy cows. California also is famous for an unfriendly workers’ compensation system that pits employers against employees and brokers millions

of dollars to related service industries. One of my pet peeves as a risk manager is the rehabilitation form used to assess an employee’s ability to return to her or his pre-injury occupation. These forms consist of job activity assessments and are generated by costly vocational rehabilitation counselors. I have found the assessments to be very useful, but only the first time a job is assessed. I frequently find multiple assessments performed for the workers’ compensation system for the exact same job description, and these assessments are never incorporated into a master job analysis.

Remember, reducing the opportunity for musculoskeletal disorders reduces the opportunity for abuse, because ultimately, great “milking” comes from unhappy employees.

### What Gets Measured

The Job Analysis module allows an organization to perform qualitative assessments and assign quantitative risk indices by task. Job tasks can be counted and summarized by job, and average risk indices can be calculated by job assignment. Active Agenda also can be used to measure the rate, frequency and cost of musculoskeletal injuries.

### What Gets Done

Practical job analyses get done with the least amount of administrative cost. Pain and discomfort get communicated quickly and efficiently, solutions get implemented, and assessments are easily refined.

### This Month’s Links:

**Demo:** [demo.activeagenda.net/list.php?mdl=jan](http://demo.activeagenda.net/list.php?mdl=jan)

**Forum:** [activeagenda.net/discussions/viewforum.php?f=16](http://activeagenda.net/discussions/viewforum.php?f=16)

**Wiki:** [activeagenda.net/documentation/index.php?title=Job\\_Analyses\\_Module](http://activeagenda.net/documentation/index.php?title=Job_Analyses_Module)

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