

Success Story:

Genie Industries Sees Ergonomics as a Process, Not a Program

Genie Industries, based in Redmond, Washington, manufactures material lifts, portable aerial work platforms, scissor lifts, and self-propelled telescopic and articulated booms. In 2007, the company began a large-scale workplace improvement initiative. "Forty percent of our injuries were work-related musculoskeletal disorders, and 60% of lost-time incidents were ergonomics-related. It was hard for us to ignore this, and we knew we had to address it," said Jennifer Swaim, Genie's Director of Environmental Health and Safety.

Get Management Buy-In

"Management buy-in is key," explains Swaim. "You're not going to get anywhere if management is not on board. The management team was looking for a process that could be implemented quickly, so we began using Humantech's RAPID™ Team Events as a way to generate many improvements in a short timeframe." Genie operates within a lean manufacturing system similar to the Toyota Production System, and RAPID Team Events are based on a kaizen approach.

Swaim notes that when implementing ergonomic changes within a lean initiative, it's important to remember that improvement is a process, not a single event. To address this, Genie's ergonomics process follows a continuous improvement model. "It's not easy to say that you're never finished making improvements, but the reality is that there will always be production changes and, along with them, the opportunity to make more ergonomic improvements."

Select the Right Team for the Job

Another key element, according to Swaim, is having the appropriate human resources to coordinate and implement improvements across facilities. "Genie dedicates one ergonomics team member per 100 employees and makes sure that the team's skill set is balanced to include fabricators, engineers, maintenance, etc. The Early Symptom Investigation teams are trained to use ergonomic assessment tools." With this support team in place, Genie plants have the internal expertise to identify/evaluate/analyze problems, identify solutions, and make workplace changes that reduce ergonomic risk factors and improve performance.

Use the Right Assessment Tools

Genie chose to use consistent tools, methods, and metrics at all plants to ensure sharing of successes and results tracking. They selected Humantech's RPM™ software program for evaluating risk factors and developing solutions. All information is recorded in a central database, which minimizes the administrative burden of processing, recalling, updating, and collating assessment records and improvement plans. In addition, it creates a central library of solutions specifically for, and available to, all Genie operations.

Measure Your Success

"One of the important things we did was to begin measuring right away. We measure ergonomic risk and how we reduce the risk. It's easy to make people feel good, but having the data keeps you on track," explains Swaim. Genie's ergonomics process focuses on proactively identifying and controlling exposure to ergonomic risk factors. In addition to tracking the traditional safety-performance measure of injury/illness rate, Genie measures and tracks the reduction of causes—before an injury occurs.

Review Improvements

Checking for success is a critical element in any continuous improvement process. As part of the Genie ergonomics process, process reviews with leaders occur regularly, and plant ergonomic process audits occur annually. "Quarterly reviews keep the progress in front of directors and management," notes Swaim.

After only one year, Genie has already seen real results from its ergonomics initiative—a 15% reduction in lost time incidents, a 16% reduction in recordable injuries, and a 15% reduction in work-related musculoskeletal disorders.

About Humantech

For nearly 30 years, global companies have relied on Humantech for workplace improvements. By combining the science of ergonomics and our unique 30-Inch View™—where people, work, and environment intersect—we deliver practical solutions that impact safety, quality, and productivity. At Humantech, we believe people make productivity happen. The 30-Inch View is a service mark of Humantech, Inc., 2007.



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