Housekeeper Managers: Improving Housekeeping Work using Ergonomics

**Ergonomics**

The science of designing jobs, equipment, and workplaces to fit the person

- Ergonomics principles are all around us, both at work and at home
- This pamphlet shows how ergonomics can be applied to housekeeping work

**Benefits of Ergonomics:**

- Improves efficiency of housekeeping work
- Increases work quality
- Reduces discomfort or pain in housekeepers
- Lowers housekeeper injury risk
- Allows housekeepers to work more easily

**Cumulative Trauma Injuries** develop over a period of weeks, months, or years and can result in back, wrist, shoulder, and neck pain.

**Examples**

Scrubbing bathroom walls

Cleaning mirrors

Dusting

Vacuuming

Some housekeeping tasks can cause pain in the neck and shoulders (e.g., irritated, swollen, or torn tendons)

**Symptoms of Possible Cumulative Trauma Injury:**

- Chronic, nagging pain or tenderness
- Muscle weakness
- Fatigue
- Joint stiffness or reduced flexibility
- Numbness in hands

**Injury Risk Factors Among Housekeepers:**

- Forceful exertions (e.g., lifting heavy mattresses, pushing heavy supply carts, using vacuum cleaners)
- Similar work postures for long periods (e.g., standing, kneeling)
- Awkward postures (e.g., cleaning bathroom floors or bathtubs)
- Repetitive activities (e.g., putting on pillowcases, cleaning mirrors, vacuuming)
- No muscle rest while working (e.g., doing many tasks using the same hand or arm)

**Overexertion** can irritate the body's muscles and tendons, but tendons take much longer to heal.

Some housekeeping tasks can put a lot of pressure on the discs in the back, which are the "shock absorbers" between vertebrae.
Making Housekeeping Work Easier

### The Work System

#### Components that impact safety and efficiency:
- **Work Environment**
  - Examples: number of beds in room; high-end or budget hotel
- **Tools & Equipment**
  - Examples: style and condition of vacuum; length of brush handles
- **Employees**
  - Examples: size and physical condition; attitude toward job

#### Work Environment

#### Tools & Equipment

#### Employees

#### Successful Work Systems

- **Management must:**
  - Be committed to improving the system
  - Provide resources for success to occur
- **Supervisors must:**
  - Empower employees to take part in identifying problems and finding solutions
  - Be proactive in seeking positive changes
- **Employees must:**
  - Understand basics of injury risks & symptoms
  - Take responsibility for their own health and safety

#### Consider Team Cleaning

- Housekeepers work together to do job
- Can benefit the employee — examples:
  - Reduces isolated work; builds social support
  - Improves employees’ occupational and communication skills
  - Empowers workers and increases morale
- Can benefit the employer — examples:
  - Increases retention, work quality and productivity
  - Reduces labor and equipment costs, supervisor’s quality-check time, employee’s temptation to steal

#### Room Design

- Consider how room features make housekeeping easier or more difficult

### Alternative Work Methods

#### Bed-Making Postures:
- Encourage use of less-awkward postures when lifting mattresses or tucking sheets

#### Vacuum Use:
- Align with body
- Alternate hands
- Proper height setting
- Empty bag frequently

#### Supply Carts:
- Keep most items between hips and chest
- Move using both hands
- Align wheels before movement
- Empty trash frequently
- Replenish cart more often
- Report cart problems to supervisor

#### Cleaning Bathrooms:
- Stand inside tub, if allowed (stand on rag)
- Keep dirty towels off floor
- Do work at waist level as often as possible
- Do not carry large or heavy weights; make more trips if possible
- Alternate arms when cleaning surfaces

### Products to Consider

#### For Beds:
- Fitted sheets instead of flat sheets
- Bed-making tools

#### For Supply Carts:
- Larger, harder wheels
- Replace worn wheels
- Motorized carts

#### For Vacuuming:
- Lighter-weight
- Self-propelled or brush-assist
- “Ergonomic” handles
- Alternatives to uprights (e.g., canisters, backpacks)

#### For Bathrooms:
- Long-handled brushes and scrubbers
- Brushes and sprayers with more-comfortable grips

### Housekeeper Health

#### Encourage Housekeepers To:
- Wear comfortable shoes at work
- “Warm-up” their bodies before starting work
- Report any unusual aches or pains
- Communicate ways they have found to make the job easier
- Improve their well-being (e.g., balanced diet, regular exercise, plenty of sleep)