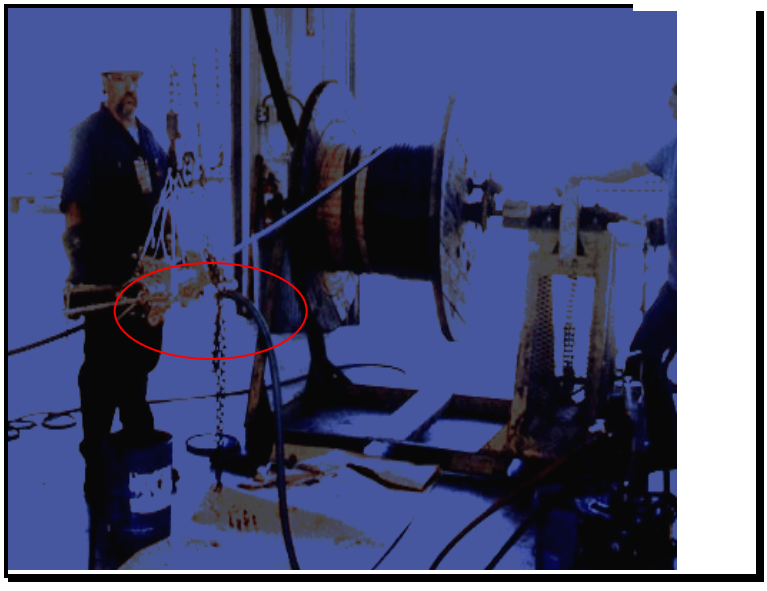
NAVY CORPORATE ERGONOMICS PLAN

Cumulative trauma disorders (CTDs), which are also known as repetitive motion injuries (RMIs), make up the fastest-growing category of occupational injuries in the U.S. To combat CTDs in the Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO)Office of Safety and Occupational Health recently established a pilot ergonomics program at five shore activities and aboard the USS Enterprise to determine the value of ergonomics in reducing the risk of CTDs at Navy work sites.

Ergonomics is the science of fitting the tool to the worker, instead of requiring the worker to adapt to the tool. According to LCDR Stan Jossell, MSC, an Industrial Hygiene Officer and the CNO's ergonomic coordinator, "We know that ergonomic interventions reduce disabilities, save money, and improve the quality of life for workers. It makes good business sense and good people sense."

The pilot ergonomics program has demonstrated reductions in the frequency and severity of CTDs by redesigning work stations and retraining workers to carry out their tasks using methods that minimize CTD risk factors.

Jossell cites the Public Works Center (PWC) San Diego redesign of a cable cleaning and lubrication task as an example of a successful ergonomic intervention. (See right and below.) Cable used to be cleaned and lubricated by hand, occasionally resulting in hand injuries that led to lost time and reduced productivity.

Under the pilot ergonomics program, PWC San Diego substituted an automated lubrication system that is more cost-effective and reduces the risk of injuries. The annual cost of the manual process exceeded $320,000, while the yearly cost of the automated system is approximately $34,000. This ergonomic intervention resulted in more than a nine-fold reduction in cable cleaning and lubrication costs in addition to the reduction in the number of hand injuries.