Practicing Ergonomic Safety Risk Assessment Auditing

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What’s UP? A Review of Changes within an Animal Care Organization

ABSTRACT

Assessment of workplace risks can be a challenge for an OHS department because of restricted access to animals and animal care personnel. Within all animal care facilities, there is an element of routinely reported injuries, that are frequently skeletal muscular injuries which includes backs, legs, shoulders and necks. Development of an Ergonomic Safety Risk Assessment within the animal organization at our institution has helped reduce injury and improved reporting of these incidents.

The auditing process of each facility within the organization has helped to develop awareness of the surrounding resources and in particular paying attention to an aging population of animal care personnel. This in turn has helped in resolving worker overload to decrease injury. Assessment of equipment, critical care space and storage areas have developed from a safety auditing committee which meets on a regular schedule. This committee has organized and developed into an observational group to identify areas associated with higher instances of injury. Equipment purchased to help the animal care group to overcome ergonomic issues are ongoing. Auditing assessment of this equipment has become part of the safety committee as well as the OHS to ensure the reduction of injury associated with ergonomic risk continues.

Continuation of a monitoring system from IACUC administration helps to keep focus within the group and an annual report developed to communicate suggestions for improvement.

INTRODUCTION

As part of maintaining an Occupational Health and Safety Program (OHSP), it was determined that an ergonomic assessment auditing of the following areas must be routinely evaluated: Control and Prevention Strategies; Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment; Facilities; Equipment; Monitoring Personnel in Training; Animal Experimentation Involving Hazards; and Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) used in the daily animal care and maintenance of all animal facility areas. As part of the Animal Exposure Occupational Health Program (AOEPH), a yearly review of Vertebrate Animal Areas for Personnel Safety and Ergonomics was established. This now has been accepted by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). As part of this review, a report is generated to establish guidelines and auditing of progress within the animal care facilities. A safety committee was also established to conduct internal auditing and assessment of equipment, personnel, workload and training. This allows the group to rotate personnel within the safety committee as well as review annual assessment conducted by the Occupational Health and Safety Specialist (OHSS).

METHODOLOGY

Ergonomic Safety Risk Assessment Auditing:

This was established to accurately determine if the process of the Ergonomic Safety reviews helped in establishing policy for change in the animal care facilities. The auditing and safety committee formation was facilitated to help with the assessment of age and dynamics of workers relative to their work load and location within the animal care facilities. Areas needing improvement are audited and assessed to determine equipment needs and physical facilities adaptations to work areas.

Reviewing workload within all facilities of muscular skeletal injury is determined by reports and observation scheduled into the daily work to observe where changes should occur. As a result of these reports, the needs of the technicians working in these areas and the injuries involving ergonomic hazards have begun to be addressed. The safety auditing program was established to report recommendations to upper management to determine budget assessment and to take action for change. This auditing process has changed the culture of how a procedure is accomplished.

RESULTS

Developing A Safety Auditing Risk Assessments for a Diverse Population of Technical staff

- Age Related Task Evaluations
- Observation of Physical Posture and Strain
- Equipment Evaluation and Assessment

Risk Auditing with Specific Injury Related Target Points

MODIFIED WORK EFFORT USING EQUIPMENT

Lifting hazards: Dumping bedding is a routine task for animal care technicians. OHSS observed that bags of heavy, soiled bedding were being lifted onto carts to be taken to the dumpster for disposal. The technicians had to lift and twist their bodies in awkward positions in order to stabilize each bag on top of the cart as they pushed it to the dumpster. Often the bags would slip and fall to the ground making the technician bend and lift the bag again. Bags of bedding were being lifted at least three feet off the ground. Reports of back injuries and pain were frequent. After an OHSS evaluation, a utility cart with doors on the front was recommended in place of the previous carts being used. This new cart allowed technicians to be lifted at least one foot off the ground and since it is an enclosed cart, bags of bedding cannot slip from side to side making transport very easy.

Priorities of Observation:

- Frequency of Exposure or Action:
  - How often the exposure occurs
  - Duration of exposure
  - Number of people exposed

Chances of Occurrence:

- Opportunity eliminates behavior
- Subjective to individual workers
- Risk observed during activity

REFERENCES


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