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## Simple Decisions May Lead to More than Simple Savings

Back to School. Back to the grind. Are temporary employees heading back to high school or college? Maybe some of your summer help has stuck around for additional employment. Though you may not be worried about the types of working/sitting areas your old employees have to deal with (at future jobs or even in the classroom), have you given much thought to the **current** working areas your **current** employees are utilizing?

In a [recent article by HRmorning.com](#), the work comp case of Angela Grott, the Illinois employee who repeatedly asked for a \$10 headset for her desk, was again noted. According to the [Belleville News Democrat](#), Grott spent time on the phone while using her computer and this may have aggravated/caused continued issues with a degenerative disk condition. It was reported that her request for the headset was denied.

Not to suggest that all injuries associated with work comp costs are related to poor ergonomics, but have you wondered if any might be related? It is something to ponder. It has been 7 years since Liberty Mutual Insurance Company released the 2004 report "Top Ten Workplace Injuries". As a reminder, the injury topping the list (and continually tops the lists) was overexertion, which the [2010 report](#) points out includes injuries related to lifting, pushing, pulling, holding, carrying, or throwing, maintained its first place rank, costing businesses **\$13.40 billion in direct costs**. However, the 13+ billion is just in direct costs. Think about the indirect costs. Yes, those.

As the [CRMXChange White Paper](#) points out, indirect costs associated with poor ergonomics include higher insurance premiums, higher employee turnover, medical treatments (therapy, medications, surgery), OSHA fines, absenteeism, associated labor costs, production loss, legal fees, personnel replacement, claims, administrative costs, worker's compensation, and lost benefits. Ann Arbor, Mich.-based Humantech provides additional information regarding lost productivity in an OM WorkSpace article. The Mich. ergonomic consulting firm came up with an interesting figure. As [OMWorkspace](#) states, an employee earning \$40,000 a year experiencing 10 minutes of lost productivity per day (due to ergonomic discomfort) costs the company \$1,042 a year in lost wages. A company with 100 employees could annual lose more than \$100,000 – just in loss productivity. Add more years... add more dollars.

Think something as minuscule as holding a telephone incorrectly isn't that big of a deal? You might want to think again. According to a recent [AT&T article](#), the following are common conditions that workers suffer from as a direct result of holding a phone between the ear and shoulder:

- **Muscle tension.** Holding the phone in this manner, so both hands can be free to work on other tasks requires constant muscle contraction. Without a recovery phase or rest, the muscles shorten and go into spasm. This causes local neck pain from the muscle tension and cramping.
- **Cramping.** As a result of sustained muscle tension and cramping, the muscles eventually shorten, causing medical conditions and pain.
- **Neck/shoulder pain.** The tight, shortened muscles on the side of the neck that holds the phone cause "Thoracic Outlet Syndrome", a painful condition of the neck, shoulder and arm from pressure on the brachial plexus. The brachial plexus is a bundle of all the nerves and blood vessels that travel into the arm.
- **Ischemia.** The reduced blood flow into the arm is a condition called "Ischemia." It can be symptom-free, but the reduced blood flow to the arm makes the hand and wrist tissues fragile and prone to conditions, such as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, from otherwise innocent activity.
- **Arm symptoms.** Resultant bulging discs, bony distortion and tight muscles can irritate or pinch nerves in the neck, which travel into the arm. This often causes arm symptoms such as ache, sharp shooting pain, numbness, tingling, tension, cramping, and weakness, which may show up as dropping things or difficulty in simply holding a pen or cup.
- **Multiple health problems.** Other conditions can result from sustained neck strain, such as facet joint injury, spinal instability, ruptured or herniated discs, and a tendency for spinal degeneration and bone spurs, an arthritic condition too often found in office-based workers. All of these conditions result in neck pain.

[Source: AT&T article, Benefits of Ergonomics in the Work Place](#)

Though the above listing may not be applicable within all industries, it may give employers something to consider. The reality of ergonomic injuries being the top among claims is a reality. Is it the top of your priority?

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