

OSHA Ergonomics Rule Released

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To the chagrin of business groups and Congressional Republicans, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has published its controversial ergonomics program final rule. The potential publication of the final rule was a major bargaining tool in discussion of the Departments of Labor, HHS, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill. Congressional Republicans were offering billions in additional funding for President Clinton's educational priorities in exchange for letting the next president decide whether to publish the final rule.

Published in the November 14, 2000, *Federal Register*, the ergonomics program addresses "the significant risk of employee exposure to ergonomic risk factors in jobs in general industry workplaces." OSHA has found that on an annual basis, nearly 600,000 musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) of the upper extremities, back, and lower extremities are reported to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). These MSDs are serious enough to cause lost work time.

A series of criteria are to be met before an "action trigger" requires an employer to identify jobs with risk factors of "sufficient magnitude, duration, or intensity to warrant further examination by the employer." The risk factors addressed by the ergonomics standard include repetition, awkward posture, force, vibration, and contact stress. If the risk factors ultimately meet the action trigger, an employer is then required to establish an ergonomics program for that job. The rule has established a specific compliance time frame for when an employee experiences an MSD incident.

The Final Rule for the Ergonomics Program Standard becomes effective on January 16, 2001, and information must be provided to employees by October 15, 2001. Because of the rule's potential effect on those working in a variety of HIM roles, the *Journal of AHIMA* will continue to monitor potential developments concerning its implementation. A copy of the final rule can be obtained at www.osha.gov.

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