

Exercise Equipment in the Workplace-Risky Business

Walking off the calories on a treadmill while working; strengthening abs while sitting on a ball at your desk – sound like good ideas? Not necessarily. Studies have shown that these practices, known as Active Workstations, lower productivity and increase the risk of injury to the employee. In general, the use of exercise equipment in the workplace increases the potential for employee injury and employer liability.

Treadmill desks and balancing balls have proven to be extremely distracting to the users. Studies show the ability to type accurately diminishes by 16% and math solving and mouse clicking skills deteriorated by 6% to 11% while walking on a treadmill.

Maintaining concentration and balance while sitting on a ball takes away from cognitive skills and increases the chance of rolling onto the floor. Ergonomic experts say that overuse combined with under- or over-inflation of the ball may contribute to lower back strain with discomfort increasing after only one hour.

- CTSI strongly recommends **against** the use of exercise equipment in a workplace setting due to the potential for employee injury. There is also inherent liability that comes from the equipment itself, whether owned, borrowed or donated, due the possibility of mechanical failure or breakdown. These failures or breakdowns can only be avoided by a strict adherence to an appropriate equipment maintenance program and enforcement of proper usage as seen at supervised exercise facilities or gymnasiums.
- CTSI recommends **against** using what have been called “Active Workstations”, which is an attempt to integrate such items as exercise balls or equipment such as treadmills into computer

workstations. Recent articles and research has found, as CTSI already suggested, that employee injuries, some serious, can result from such integration.

- CTSI highly **recommends** regular breaks to “get up and move” from seated workstations. Seated workers should get up at least once every hour to get a drink, retrieve a file, go to the copier, bathroom, or simply stretch in place. These “get up and move” breaks are not official work breaks, but a chance to move from the seated position, get the blood flowing, and allow the body to “re-set” from the seated worker position.
- CTSI provides ergonomic training for employees and supervisors. One class which has been very successful is **Supervisor Ergonomic Basics**. This class introduces the basics of seated worker ergonomics, and provides a simple checklist which supervisors can use to spot potential ergonomic issues and implement changes before they become serious and/or cause injuries.

What This Means to Counties

As with most exercise regimens, people tend to lose interest in workstation and other fitness products over time. The idea of providing exercise equipment to your employees, even if it is for use on their own time, should be compared to the risk of injury and liability associated with such a program. For more information on an ergonomic program, contact your CTSI loss prevention representative at 303-861-0507.