

Case study

Preventing musculoskeletal illnesses



Our Western Australia Iron Ore (WAIO) Asset has developed and implemented an evidence-based Musculoskeletal Injury and Illness Prevention Program in response to a large number of reported musculoskeletal illnesses.

The Program takes a proactive approach with employee involvement a key element. Employees participating in the program help to identify risk factors, undertake risk assessments and verify effectiveness of controls. This means the employee plays an essential role in reducing the risk of musculoskeletal injury and illness to themselves and others.

The Program consists of four key phases:

Understand and identify the risk

- Using a combination of injury/illness data analysis, infield observations and stakeholder engagement.

Undertake the risk assessment

- Using the manual task risk assessment tool with employee and supervisor input to assess the risks and identify potential solutions.

Implement controls

- Using the hierarchy of control for the most effective and sustainable solutions with management support for control selection and implementation.

Review and verify effectiveness of controls

- Using a combination of lead and lag indicators and provide feedback to employees involved in the process.

Since the introduction of the Musculoskeletal Injury and Illness Prevention Program, there has been a measurable improvement on total recordable injury frequency and occupational illness frequency. Employee engagement in hazardous manual task risk identification and assessment has also increased. As a result of the Program and a number of other contributing factors, musculoskeletal illness incidence at our Iron Ore Business has reduced by approximately 50 per cent.

At our New South Wales Energy Coal Asset, in Australia, a musculoskeletal risk program is in place, including an onsite physiotherapist three days a week, task analysis of roles, and truck seats designed to reduce vibration and shock exposure.

At Escondida, our Copper Asset in Chile, a comprehensive ergonomic risk assessment and control program has been implemented. This program includes a survey of the work positions and tasks with musculoskeletal risks.