Employee Discomfort Questionnaire Guidelines

Usage and Interpretation
The usage of psychophysical rating questionnaires to make a subjective assessment of discomfort, fatigue and physical exertion levels is not new. Various medical and safety groups have used similar forms and data for a variety of purposes.

The attached form has been developed as a tool in conducting comprehensive ergonomic evaluations of industrial work areas. The data derived from surveys of the labor force on either a macro (plant-wide) basis or micro (one job family, dependent, etc.) basis can be extremely useful in developing an accurate understanding of occupational physical stress problems.

The primary benefits of workforce discomfort surveys are:

- Accurate determination of specific body parts which may be adversely affected by existing work practices and conditions.
- Job families, specific jobs and even specific task components which may be causing employee complaints, discomfort and disease.
- Identification of previously unidentified ergonomic problems and/or under or unreported injury/disease problems or conditions.
- Development of a basis for determining prioritization of conducting an ergonomic assessment among large industrial workforces with numerous and varied job tasks.
- Assists in establishing useful demographic data with respect to specific risk factors for various musculoskeletal disorders.

Generally, a very common intuitive concern regarding the performance of conducting discomfort surveys is that certain negative results will occur. The two most commonly expressed concerns are:

- The survey will result in numerous new workers compensation claims.
- Employees will react negatively in some manner, resulting in labor problems.

In reality, neither of these concerns develop. What generally occurs is:

- A positive reaction on the part of the labor force feeling that management is concerned with their well-being and opinions.
- Positive worker feelings by providing a forum to report or express suggestions and comments with regard to their individual job tasks and working conditions.

One of the real benefits of performing EDQ surveys is that many task functions can result in pain and discomfort which may not be obvious to the person evaluating or observing the job. Everyone would generally agree that in order to fully understand the problems associated with any manual task requires one to actually perform the job for a reasonable length of time.

As such, worker input is a vital component of occupational ergonomics and accurate diagnosis of problems within the workplace.
Instructions to Employees
An EDQ should be given to each person within the plant, department or job family being evaluated.

They should be instructed to complete the form honestly and as completely as they feel they can comfortably. That is, their name and any other data should be considered optional. Also, if they would rather not participate in the survey, they should be told that is perfectly acceptable.

Employees should be told honestly that these survey forms are for evaluation of their work area and are for research purposes only. The results of the survey do not in any way reflect on their jobs or their performance.

Employees should be asked to recall to the best of their ability any episodes of pain or discomfort which lasted for at least 5 days and rate this discomfort on a 1 - 10 scale.

Their subjective rating should be placed in the box corresponding to the body part or parts where the pain was experienced.

Evaluation of Results
Once completed, the forms should be evaluated looking for the following data which may indicate further review of work practices and conditions.

- Individual high ratings of discomfort above the group average. Generally, ratings of “7” or higher have traditionally indicated real disease or significant fatigue and discomfort.
- Moderate scores of “4-6” usually indicate noticeable but tolerable levels of discomfort or fatigue, but may still require further job task review.
- Special write-in comments regarding individual problems or discomfort at some body part. Many employees use these questionnaires to indicate specific job functions or workstation design features which place constraints upon comfortable job performance.

Essentially, these forms and their subjective ratings by employees should be used to help isolate problem areas, specific task functions, etc., which may be more difficult to identify during routine visual observations and task evaluations.