

DoD Ergonomics Working Group NEWS



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You've Seen Secretary Rumsfeld's Challenge: Reduce Preventable Accidents by 50% in Two Years.

“World-class organizations do not tolerate preventable accidents. Our accident rates have increased recently, and we need to turn this situation around. I challenge all of you to reduce the number of mishaps and accident rates by at least 50% in the next two years. These goals are achievable, and will directly increase our operational readiness. We owe no less to the men and women who defend our Nation.”

Now What are You Going to Do in the Next Two Years to Meet This Challenge?

At our recent Annual DoD Ergonomics Conference, we asked the experts for their advice. Addressing our attendees at the opening plenary session were **Connie DeWitte**, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Safety; **Jerry Aslinger**, Contract Program Manager supporting the Director of Readiness Programming and Assessment; **Dave Alexander**, President, Auburn Engineers, Inc.; and **Hal Hendrick**, Lt. Col (ret.), Principal, Hendrick and Associates. These four champions of safety best practices shared their perspectives from Navy, Department of Defense, and private industry experience. Though all four represented different points of view, they shared one common message:

“You can reduce accidents by 50% and it can be done in two years.”

Where Do You Start?

- **Believe it's possible.** Reducing accidents by 50% is only too big a goal if you think in terms of reducing rates for the entire military. Approach the reduction on an installation by installation basis, and then units within those installations.
- **Aim for the low hanging fruit.** Get the easiest 50%—focus on the three or four jobs or programs that cause the biggest problems and have the most accidents. By simply shooting for the top half of these jobs and implementing good practices you're already aware of, you should see a significant reduction.
- **Devise a plan.** Review the injury log, make a list of the “bad” jobs, determine what will be needed to reduce injuries and how much those solutions will cost, and draw up an action plan with dollar figures assigned to each item. After the plan is drafted, then get buy-in. Circulate the plan for comments and “enhancement” (don't ask for a critique!).
- **Present the plan to senior command for support and funding.** You don't have to argue for support—Secretary Rumsfeld is already providing it. His challenge is your leverage. He's telling you that injury reduction is important.

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- **Identify who is available to make the 50% reduction happen.** Create a core team to provide expertise and oversee the efforts. Train them and turn them loose!
- **Stress that safety is everyone's responsibility.** You must have "participatory ergonomics"—hold focus groups, ask workers to identify problems. Everyone's mantra should be "**Mission first, safety always.**"

What Do You Need?

There are two key components to a 50% reduction in accidents:

- **The Best People.** Recruit, develop, and retain the best and the brightest. Offer rewards. Provide opportunities for safety professionals. Underscore that this is interesting and exciting work and it's a public service. "Get smart ideas to smart people."
- **The Most Effective Process.** A system for reducing accidents can either make things easy and natural or can be set up for failure. Put initiatives and metrics in place to change the paradigm—it can no longer be business as usual. Work to create a culture of safety.

What's Next?

Follow-on issues of this newsletter will detail upcoming DoD initiatives and share effective best practices. In addition to Ergo News, there are many resources available to you to meet the 50% reduction challenge—whether you need to establish an ergonomics program or enhance an existing one. For expert assistance, contact the United States Army Center for Health Promotion & Preventive Medicine (USACHHPM) Ergonomics Program: Toll-Free: 800-222-9698, ext. 3928; Commercial: 410-436-3928; DSN: 584-3928.

The Challenge May Be a 50% Reduction, But No Accidents is Your Goal!

"This is serious...just being a little bit better every year is not sufficient...our real goal is getting preventable accidents to zero."

**- David Chu
Under Secretary of
Defense for Personnel
and Readiness**