

Professor helps revise OSHA standards

Proposed ergonomics regulations would force workstation safety

By KIM SWEET
Staff writer

Businesses potentially employing UNL students could be more worker-friendly in the future thanks to the efforts of a University of Nebraska-Lincoln professor.

Dave Cochran, professor of industrial and management systems engineering, helped to form a working draft of ergonomics standards that was released two weeks by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

The standards deal with ergonomics, the science of adapting work conditions to suit workers.

If passed, the standards would force businesses to make workstations less likely to cause work-related musculoskeletal disorders, such as carpal tunnel syndrome, in employees.

Susan Hallbeck, associate professor of industrial engineering, said the proposed standards her co-worker Cochran helped formulate were needed in a number of manufacturing industries.

"The general concept I have seen so far is wonderful," Hallbeck said. "(The standards) are beneficial not only from a physical point of view, but are beneficial to the workers psychologically."

Implementing ergonomic standards will reduce injuries and allow workers to be able to work to an older age,

Hallbeck said.

Making sure working environments are ergonomically correct will also allow people to go home from work injury-free, enabling them to have a life outside of their work, Hallbeck said.

The standards are also beneficial for companies. Working environments less prone to injuries could improve worker moral and productivity, she said.

There have been efforts to create ergonomic standards since 1992, Cochran said. The efforts were halted by congressional action.

The process started up again, but has been riddled with politics, Cochran said.

Some business groups have criticized the legitimacy of ergonomics, saying there isn't enough scientific research to prove the problems ergonomics claims to solve really exist. But Cochran said the amount of

research on musculoskeletal disorders and ergonomics is significant.

Research done by the Bureau of Labor Statistics states that musculoskeletal disorders account for 34 percent of all lost workday injuries and illnesses. They also account for every \$1 of \$3 spent in workers compensation, according to OSHA's Web site.

Michael Riley, chairman and professor of industrial and management systems engineering, agreed with Cochran about the amount of research showing that musculoskeletal disorders are prevalent in workplaces.

He said many criticisms of ergonomics come from people who are leery of more regulations in workplaces.

"People are going to criticize it because they see it as more regulation," Riley said.

The process the recommendations must go through to become a standard is

extensive, Cochran said.

The next step in the implementation process requires OSHA to consult with industries the standard will affect. Suggestions for improvements will be taken.

After many consultations with industry leaders and revisions of the working draft, the standard is printed in the Federal Register. Cochran said he hopes this step occurs by Sept. 30.

"OSHA works very hard to write a final rule or standard," Cochran said. "It's a very long, deliberate process."

Hallbeck said Cochran's work in collaborating with labor unions, manufacturing associations, government workers and other groups to formulate the standards was extremely commendable and reflected well on UNL.

"There are really very few people in the country who could pull it off," she said.

Scams may put damper on spring break plans

SCAMS from page 1

The group received only a small reimbursement for unplanned expenses, said Jim Reed, a junior marketing major.

"They gave us a bunch of stuff we didn't use, like a free boat ride, some lunches and free entrances to parties," he said. Lee called the Better Business Bureau to complain. The company, which had changed names several times, had disappeared.

Lee said he will be more careful the next time he buys a spring break trip package.

"(I'll use) my travel agent, so I can go this time," he said.

Stall came to her office after spring break about 10 years ago and found eight angry students waiting outside.

The students had paid for a spring break package, but the out-of-state company they had bought it from had disappeared. The students never got their money back.

"The company couldn't be prosecuted because they couldn't be found," Stall said. She said local travel agents are easier to sue because they can't disappear as readily.

Local travel agents are also more likely to work with students because they want a good reputation, she said, and are easier to contact if students get stranded. A travel Web site or an out-of-state company may not be able to help in emergencies, she said.

No matter what company used, she said, students should question the written contract before paying for the trip.

"You'll want to find out what is the 'reputable hotel,'" Stall said.

Marilyn Bath, a consumer specialist in Nebraska Attorney General Don Stenberg's office, said her consumer protection office hasn't received many complaints about hotels.

"Once students arrive, they're having so much fun they don't care if there are cockroaches under the bed," she said.

Students looking to spend a week on the powdery slopes or the sandy beaches ...

should take some precautions before buying a travel package. These tips are courtesy of UNL Student Legal Services and the Nebraska Attorney General's office.

1. Use a local travel company you have heard good things about in the past.
2. Call the Better Business Bureau at (402) 476-5261 to ask about a travel company's reputation.
3. Don't buy a package over the phone.
4. Pay with a credit card.
5. Read the entire contract before you sign.
6. See if the contract allows the company to change the travel dates.
7. Ask the company the actual names of the hotels and airlines. If possible, make sure the hotel is not in a bad area of town.

Being stranded in an airport is a common complaint, Bath said, because companies can sometimes delay trips.

"It's not always a scam," Bath said. "It's just that students fail to read the contract carefully."

Stall said she expects to receive the frantic phone calls again this April. Both Stall and Bath said students shouldn't be embarrassed to complain.

"Many intelligent people fall victim," Bath said. "It's easier to be scammed than you might think."

Programs bring taste of Asian culture to campus

ASIA from page 1

wisdom and peace lies hidden in the highlands of Central Asia.

The paradise has jewel lakes, wish-fulfilling trees and speaking stones.

The event, organizers said, was a way to show Shangri La was accessible to anyone.

She added that this event brought the Asian Student Alliance one step closer to its goal of creating an understanding of the diverse cultures in Asia.

Sarah Kippenbrock, a freshman biology major, said the features of the Asian cultures at the events fascinated her.

Kippenbrock said a lack of understanding exists between American and Asian students on campus, and more events like these could increase understanding.

"Students from Nebraska don't see meeting Asian students as a learning experience," she said.

Chee-Peng Tan, president of the Malaysian Student Association, said the Malaysian event brought University of Nebraska-Lincoln students of different cultures together.

"I feel good about seeing Americans and Malaysians getting into contact at this festival."



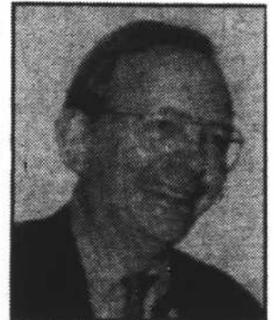
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