

THE “NOISE” SURROUNDING THE SIT-STAND WORKSTATION

Since the 60-Minutes story aired during September 2014 “Stand Up Australia - is sitting down killing us?” we have received many enquiries from clients and friends regarding their duty to provide “sit-stand” workstations to their employees.

The current controversy regarding the “sit-stand” phenomena is another example where the word “safety” and “OHS” has been used irresponsibly. The emotional blackmail that has been used to make workplaces believe that to provide a safe workplace, they must provide “sit-stand” workstations is NOT TRUE. Yes, you absolutely, do have a duty to provide a safe workplace, but NO, THIS DOES NOT MEAN that you need to purchase a bunch of “sit-stand” workstations.

Think back 10 years, can you recall the saddle seat? Do you recall fit-balls replacing office chairs? If you can't, consider taking a look in your store room, you may find them there.

This article is not saying that there are not benefits to standing across the work day. It would be crazy to. The well reported health hazards associated with prolonged sitting include (but are not limited to):

- X** increased pressure on the spine;
- X** increased strain on muscles and ligaments;
- X** evidence that suggests that high levels of sitting are now considered risk factors for some cancers, cardiovascular disease, diabetes;
- X** calorie-burning rate drops to just 1 cal/min; or
- X** enzymes that help break down fat drop 90%.

This article is designed to challenge organisations to adopt the risk management approach and consult with their workplace when making ergonomic changes that impact worker health and safety.

Before we go further, let's consider how long a typical worker sits at work. During a 38-hour working week, a worker will only sit at work for 32% of a working day, or only 23% of a working week. This being the case, why is our seated posture at work, the only time there is a focus on changing between sitting and standing?

Have employees in your workplace considered times outside of your workplace where they could stand? For example:

- Standing whilst travelling to and from work?
- Reviewing leisure time activities – are these focused around TV, computers, dining, etc?

If “sit-stand” workstations have been under consideration in your workplace – have you investigated other methods that

may be used to manage the hazard – prolonged sitting?

Many of the aforementioned risks can be minimised by simply moving out of a seated posture for two (2) minutes every hour. No workplace that we have worked with has advised us that workers “must” remain seated at their desk, across their full work day. Why is this important? Because it means that sit-stand workstations are NOT your only reasonable method of control.

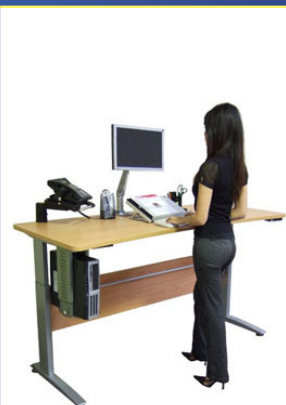



To manage the reported risks associated with prolonged sitting, in consultation with your HSRs and Health and Safety Committee (as applicable), has your workplace considered ALL options to support workers moving out of a seated posture? For example, has your workplace considered:

- Standing meetings?
 - Y / N: Can you remove chairs from some meeting rooms?
 - Y / N: Can you provide benches at a raised height, that workers can stand around?
- Walking meetings. Provide a clipboard then:
 - Y / N: Map out a 1.5 to 2 km circuit a for a 30 minute meeting?
 - Y / N: Map out a 3 to 4 km circuit for a 60 minute meeting?
- Running a campaign to encourage a standing and moving culture? Can workers:
 - Y / N: Stand when answering phone calls?
 - Y / N: Stand when reviewing / reading documents – could you be standing now?
 - Y / N: Stand when a colleague comes to your desk or office?
 - Y / N: Walk to a kitchen, printer or amenity that is not the closest?
 - Y / N: Use telephones and/or calendars to set a “change” posture reminder?
 - Y / N: Use the stairs instead of the lift?

All of the above considerations will support workers to stand intermittently across the working day, and to move out of a seated posture – supporting proactive management of the hazard.

This all being said, following consultation, if your workplace has decided to move down the path of introducing sit-stand workstations, are you aware of the options that are available? Below provides an overview of the options and some points that you should consider prior to purchase.

BUILDING A SAFE WORKPLACE TOGETHER

Sit-Stand Workstation Option	Points to consider	Approx. Cost
Sit-Stand Adjustable Desk – Electric	 The weight load that the desk can hold and speed that the desk will move varies from 30-120 kg and 2-5 mm/sec respectively. Variation in functionality is the main reason for the differences in price.	\$1,250.00
Sit-Stand Adjustable Desk – Manual Crank	 Are you confident that your workers will make the effort to manually wind-up and/or wind down the desk? If not, you may find that the desk height remains unchanged. Additionally, there have been multiple reports that if the objects on the desk are arranged in a way where one side is heavier than the other, then the crank may have a very hard time of handling the weight discrepancy and keep the desktop horizontal.	\$900.00
Retrofitted Height Adjustment	 Ensure that metal plate that the keyboard sits on perfectly aligns to the desk when lowered into the seated posture. Clients have reported that this does not always occur. Issue: the keyboard moves/bounces when keying, frustrating the worker. Additionally, the worker has limited room to work from when standing. If the worker has to regularly review documents, or use a phone, will this option make things all too hard?	\$500.00
Moveable (Customised) Box	 The most cost effective option. However, the worker will not be able to “easily” move between a seated and standing posture when compared to the other options. In addition, as the box dimensions are fixed – this set-up will be specific to the worker. Safe workstation posture when standing whilst typing requires the worker’s elbows to be at, or slightly above, the height of the keyboard.	\$200.00

Discomfort, tiredness, and sore feet can result from standing for long periods of time. This may lead to an underutilisation of a sit-stand workstation. Heeled and leather shoes typically do not provide thick insulating soles or shock-absorbing insoles like sport shoes. Providing options with footwear may support the management of foot fatigue. The cushioning provided by anti-fatigue matting is another option that may support the management of foot fatigue. It must be advised that the use of anti-fatigue matting requires caution, as these mats prohibit office chair utilisation and can also lead to tripping hazards. Therefore, when introducing sit-stand workstations into the workplace, your workplace may also want to review footwear (for example the clothing policy) and/or anti-fatigue matting – to support ongoing utilisation.

It is important to remember that being seated at work is not only limited to office workers, but also extends to drivers – such as taxi and truck drivers. The cynic in me is swayed to believe that the hazard of sitting is currently out of proportion with the direct risk, as these workers have been “forgotten” from the conversation. Alternatively, this may be because those reporting the importance of standing at work are those with the most to gain – the suppliers of the sit-stand workstations or aligned products. Either way, it is important that drivers are considered in any sit-stand strategies your workplace is looking to establish.

This all being said – if you have any questions regarding workstation ergonomics, sit-stand workstations or policies – please do not hesitate to [contact us](#).