



## Prosperous times for industrial hygienists

Advertisements for office furniture usually feature dynamic, young people. Brimming with health and full of self-confidence, they sit at splendid desks tinkering with a slim laptop or the latest mobile.

How different reality is! The office of the near future is not populated by young high-potentials, but by grey-haired old timers. In 2040 the over-fifties will make up one third of the working population. The hallmarks of this target group include not only experience and wisdom, but also 'functional limitations', that is minor ailments and infirmities.

These will be prosperous times for industrial hygienists and ergonomists. They will explain to firms in great detail how workplaces must be adapted to the supposed motor, visual and auditory limitations of the older worker. Think of wide corridors, for example, where wheelchairs and rollators can get past each other, of 'step-less offices' with no daunting, hip-breaking stair sections, of sheltered workplaces with permanently employed nursing staff, of wider toilets so that older workers with walking sticks can manage to get in. Think of apparently insignificant things too, such as big and contrasting lettering on nameplates and signposting, so that people with visual impairment do not lose their way. And do not forget the ever-problematic office acoustics. Reverberation times and absorption

values must be set to hard-of-hearing older people, who have the reputation of not listening, as it is.

As far as office furniture is concerned, consideration must be given to designs which are comfortable for fragile bones, shaky backs and contracted tendons. Chairs and tables will have to be adjustable in every possible dimension. Also, manufacturers are right to extend their ranges with ergonomic accessories such as footrests, standing stools, wrist, arm and palm supports and desktop extenders.

Few of these products have a demonstrable effect, but they are very popular among people who have already been sitting in an office chair for thirty years and have to continue working for another ten.

The essence of all this is that a safe and healthy working environment must be created. That is important not only for older people, but also for everyone who has to spend their days at the office. And anyway, disabilities are not confined to older people, as even the handsome young man in the advertisement may be in a wheelchair tomorrow.

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