



What Cost Is Justifiable In Preventing RSI's

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So the Auditor General's Office of the Government of Alberta wants to spend nearly \$800,000 to upgrade office furniture for all the employees? This announcement sparked an incredible outrage in the press and public, especially when it was reported that each workstation would average over \$7,000 in equipment and furniture. As is the regular course of events of this nature, no one has identified the key issues and looked to understand them from the proper perspective.

There are two points at play in this issue. The first is whether or not changes are really required and the second is whether an expenditure of \$7,000 per work station is required to alleviate the concerns and whether surplus equipment from downsizing would be a more appropriate.

Obviously, no one can get the answers to these questions without a detailed examination of the facts. The television coverage of the offices definitely detailed workstations that are not consistent with the existing computer technology and chairs that were obviously worn out and poorly designed. The surplus equipment being stored in Edmonton did not appear to offer anything better. So the early answer to the first question appears to be, "Yes, there is a significant need driven by function and ergonomic safety issues".

Spending \$7,000 or more on each workstation to remedy these concerns is, on the surface at least, quite a large figure. It may include divider panels and other aspects of a workstation we don't routinely consider. Even so, the figure still seems high as it is possible to remedy the ergonomic and function issues for less than half of that cost quite adequately.

People being hurt in meeting the objectives of a company partly or wholly because they are using inadequate equipment is morally unacceptable as well as fiscally unwise. One case of Repetitive Strain Injury can easily cost in excess of \$15,000 and some cases end up in six figures. The question does not seem to be whether or not it is appropriate to spend money to overcome ergonomic issues, but whether \$7,000 per workstation or more is appropriate to facilitate it.