

Ergonomic Successes Through OSHA's Cooperative Programs

José Carlos N. Banaag
Staff Engineer
Honda of America MFG., Inc.
Marysville, OH

Introduction

Safety at Honda of America MFG., Inc. (HAM) is more than just a word. It is a way of life. It is a part of producing the safest, highest quality vehicles in the world.

That same commitment to safety can be found in our workplace, where empowered associates are a key source of new ideas.

In manufacturing, there is a constant emphasis on safety at all stages of production. It begins early in the product design stage when engineers work closely with manufacturing associates to understand each area and adjust part designs to make new models safer to build. Ideas such as larger openings in doors to assemble interior parts and magnets to hold overhead parts in place while they are fastened make associates' jobs better and safer.

This commitment to safety extends into each department where experts are responsible for evaluating the safety of each process. These trained associates analyze jobs and parts installation processes to make recommendations for improvements. Through their work, tools such as lift assists to help install parts and new low vibration tools have been installed throughout the manufacturing process.

Last year, HAM associates submitted more than 700 safety suggestions to improve their work environment. For the past eleven years, teams of HAM associates have competed against the largest corporations in the world in the Ergo Cup, awarded by the Institute of Industrial Engineers (IIE). HAM has won this Ergo Cup four times, while two other Honda companies (Honda of Canada Mfg., Inc. and Honda Manufacturing of Alabama, LLC) have also won this prestigious award.

Honda of America's Alliance with OSHA

Honda of America MFG., Inc. has developed and maintained an open relationship with the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) through the past several years, particularly through its Area Office in Columbus, Ohio. OSHA has approached HAM on a number of occasions to participate in OSHA Cooperative Programs, such as the

Alliance Program and the Voluntary Protection Program (VPP). OSHA views HAM as having a positive influence with its part suppliers, and other automotive companies, as well as other companies within the communities where it operates, to encourage continual improvement towards the prevention of injuries, illnesses and fatalities.

HAM's commitment to safety led to an alliance with OSHA in March 2008 that is unique within the automotive industry. Through this alliance program, OSHA acknowledged HAM as a leader in the field of ergonomics among American industrial companies. The alliance is committed to fostering a safe and healthful workplace by focusing on reducing and preventing catastrophic and serious injuries. It provides HAM associates and others in the automotive industry with information, guidance and access to resources on best safety and ergonomics practices. This alliance also has a special focus on ergonomic hazards, which are a significant source of lost-time and restricted-duty injuries in the automotive industry.

Alliance Results to Date—Ergonomics

As a result of the alliance with OSHA, Honda of America Mfg., Inc. has been able to enhance its ergonomics program.

Ergonomics Success Stories

One area where HAM has been able to improve its ergonomics program is in the communication of ergonomics successes throughout its various manufacturing plants in Ohio, as well as sharing the same information with other Honda companies and facilities worldwide. This has become one avenue in which HAM provides training and education for its associates.

Using the OSHA "Ergonomics Successes" Web page as a guide, Honda of America developed and rolled out an "Ergonomics Solutions" Web site as part of its intranet system. This website was made available not only to HAM associates who have day-to-day responsibilities in ergonomics and safety, but to all Honda associates who have access to the Honda intranet system globally. This Ergonomics Solutions Web site currently contains over a hundred success stories, and the corporate ergonomics group continues to populate this Web site with similar successes each day. Similar to stories included in the OSHA Ergonomics Successes Web page, each success story contains a summary of the ergonomics concern prior to the improvement project, a description of the ergonomics improvement (including how it was developed), and a summary of the outcome of this improvement project. Each success story also outlines the return on investment (ROI) for each ergonomics improvement project, including the impact not only in the area of ergonomics and safety (particularly in injury avoidance and risk reduction), but also in the other business performance measures such as quality, productivity and overall associate morale.

The Ergonomics Solutions Web page provides a listing of these ergonomics success stories by Honda plant and by the type of manufacturing operation (e.g., weld, paint, assembly) to make it easier for potential users to search these various projects. Furthermore, the ergonomics success stories are also flagged to indicate if these were projects that have been part of HAM's annual Ergo Cup activity. Figure 1 shows a snap shot of the main Ergonomics Solutions Web page. Figure 2 provides an example of one of these ergonomics improvement projects that is contained within this Web page.

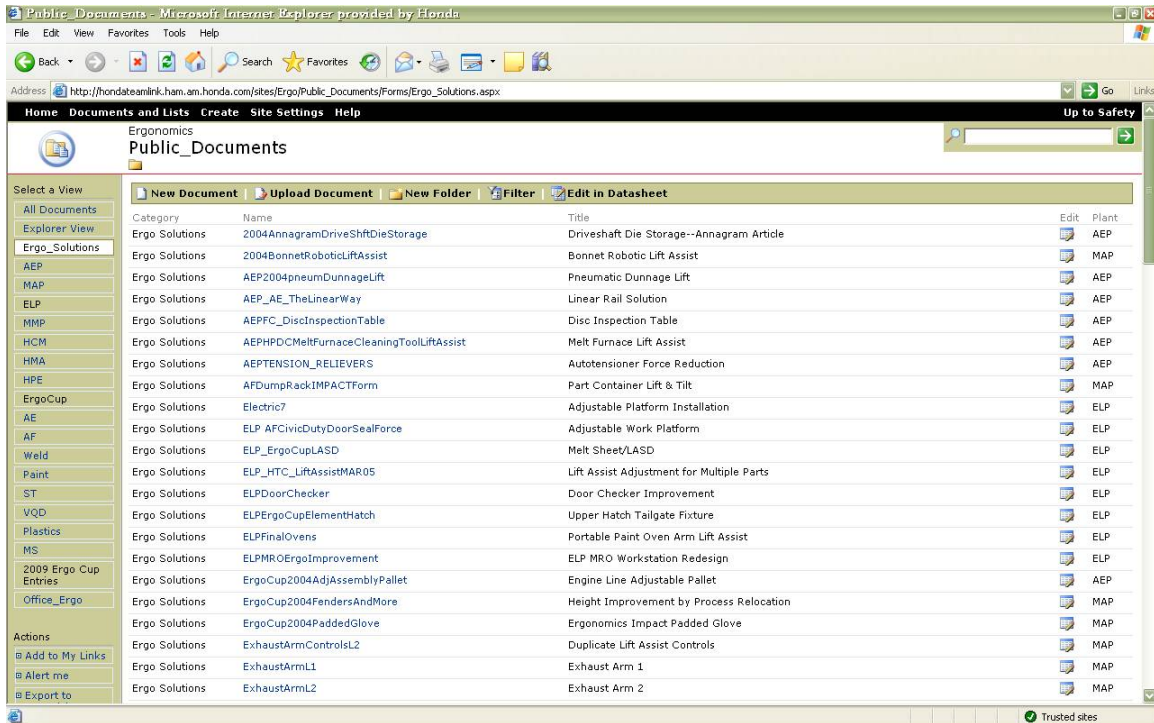


Figure 1. This is the Ergonomics Solutions web page within the Honda intranet system.

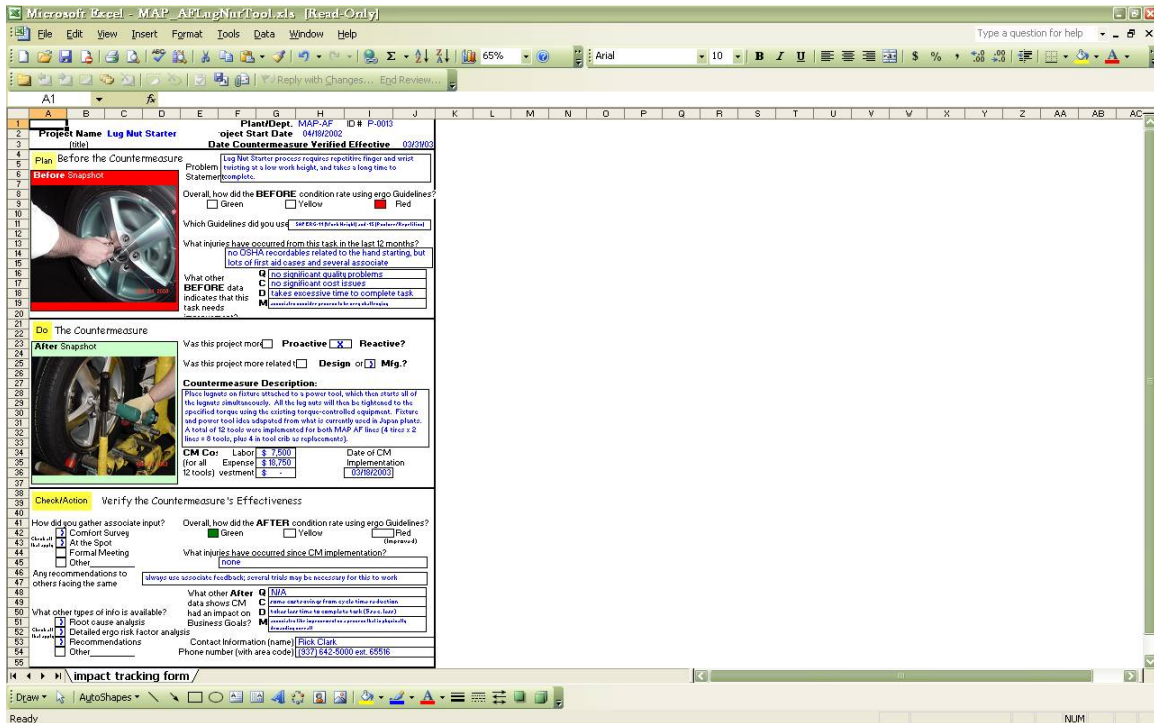


Figure 2. This is an example of one of the ergonomics success stories as part of the Ergonomics Solutions webpage within the Honda intranet system.

HAM Ergo Cup Activity

As mentioned earlier, Honda of America MFG., Inc. has participated in the Ergo Cup Competition for the past several years. The Ergo Cup Competition is one of the highlights of the annual Applied Ergonomic Conference, hosted by the Institute of Industrial Engineers (IIE). Teams from companies all over the world come to present their ergonomics improvement projects to the conference attendees. A group of ergonomics experts from the conference committee judge these projects and award the teams with the best ergonomics improvements.

HAM conducts an internal Ergo Cup run-off from teams of associates within its plants in Ohio to select the teams that will represent the company to this annual competition. Prior to this Alliance, HAM has used its internal ergonomics experts—those who have an inherent knowledge of the company’s manufacturing operations—to judge the various teams vying to win the HAM Ergo Cup run-off. However, during the actual annual Ergo Cup Competition, the judges at the Applied Ergonomic Conference may not necessarily have any intrinsic knowledge of Honda operations, nor of automotive manufacturing in general. Hence, HAM decided to use “guest” judges who have no pre-existing biases about HAM’s workplace conditions. Toledo Area Director Jule Hovi and CAS Charles Shelton served as guest judges during the October 9, 2008, event. Columbus Deputy Area Director Dave Wilson and CAS Howard Eberts served as guest judges during the October 15, 2009, event.



Figure 3. OSHA Columbus Deputy Area Director Dave Wilson and CAS Howard Eberts judge one of HAM’s entries at the HAM Ergo Cup event last October 15, 2009.

Aside from merely serving as guest judges for the HAM Ergo Cup run-off activity, the representatives from the OSHA Area Offices that have jurisdiction over HAM plants (Columbus Area Office for the Marysville Auto Plant and Toledo Area Office for the East Liberty Plant and the Anna Engine Plant) were also able to provide positive feedback to the HAM associates who participated in this event. This allows HAM associates to learn more not just about ergonomics, but also what guest judges external to HAM operations may be focusing on and looking for in terms of evaluating the effectiveness of ergonomics improvement projects. Hence, the quality of these ergonomics improvement projects has also improved in the last couple of years. This provides HAM with better projects to select from, which will then represent the company in the annual Ergo Cup Competition, typically held every March.

OSHA Ergonomics Success Stories

Honda of America MFG., Inc. has also contributed two ergonomics success stories in the first year of its alliance with OSHA. This has helped HAM promote its ergonomics successes outside of the company. This helps in the company's direction of "being a company that society wants to exist." Providing success stories for this OSHA ergonomics Web page helps promote the company's image of putting value in its associates' safety and well-being, believing in the foundation of the Honda Philosophy of "respect for the individual."

Alliance Results to Date—Other Safety Areas

Aside from activities related to ergonomics, the alliance between OSHA and Honda of America MFG., Inc. has also resulted in other activities and products in the last couple of years.

Outreach and Communication

Honda of America MFG., Inc. is a member of the Logan County Safety Council through its East Liberty Plant. On April 17, 2008, Toledo Area Office CAS Charles Shelton presented an OSHA Update at the Logan County Safety Council monthly breakfast meeting. HAM is also a member of the Union County Safety Council through its Marysville Auto Plant. On September 10, 2008, Howard Eberts presented an OSHA Update at the Union County Safety Council monthly luncheon meeting. Compliance assistance materials and the meeting presentations were made available to members of both safety councils.

Training and Education

Honda of America MFG., Inc. holds an annual Supplier Safety and Ergonomics Symposium for its parts suppliers every November. There were a couple of training sessions conducted as a result of the alliance between OSHA and HAM. OSHA Region V Director Michael Connors presented a keynote session on "The Value of Management Commitment" at this supplier symposium in Indianapolis, IN on November 6, 2008, as well as participating in a panel discussion with HAM's Senior Vice President Tom Shoupe and Indiana-OSHA Deputy Commissioner Jeffrey Carter. During the same symposium, Toledo Area Office CAS Charles Shelton and Columbus Area Office CAS Howard Eberts facilitated a roundtable discussion on "Managing OSHA Inspections." OSHA Columbus Office Area Director Deborah Zubaty presented the keynote session on "OSHA Under the New Administration" at this supplier

symposium in Marysville, OH on November 5, 2009. OSHA made the presentations available to Honda's parts suppliers who sent representatives to attend these symposia.

National Dialogue on Safety and Health

The Alliance was promoted at one of the meetings of The Automotive Safety Forum (TASF), which represents all automakers in the United States, except for Ford, GM, and Chrysler. The TASF meets once or twice a year throughout the United States to address current safety and health issues in the auto manufacturing industry. Columbus Area Office CAS Howard Eberts made a presentation on OSHA cooperative programs to the TASF meeting, hosted by Hyundai at their facility outside of Montgomery, AL, in April 2008.

Summary

The alliance between OSHA and Honda of America MFG., Inc. has proven to be beneficial to HAM. The company received a lot of useful advice from OSHA, particularly in improving its ergonomics program, with emphasis on the involvement and participation of associates at all levels. Information has been shared not only with HAM, but also with its parts suppliers and with other automotive companies.

HAM has also shared a couple of ergonomics improvement projects with OSHA for publication in its Ergonomics Success Stories Web page.

In the end, this alliance has helped continue the positive relationship between Honda of America MFG., Inc. and OSHA, not only at the local level, but at the regional and national levels as well. This positive relationship becomes a win-win situation for both HAM and OSHA. HAM does not perceive OSHA as merely a "safety police," but as a valuable resource for advice and information on safety and health issues. OSHA continues to acknowledge HAM as a company that strives "to do the right thing" in terms of the health, safety, and well-being of its associates, as well as being one of the proactive leaders in safety and health not only among automotive companies, but throughout the community in general.

Bibliography

U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Public Affairs. *News Release: U.S. Department of Labor's OSHA forms safety alliance with Honda of America Mfg.'s Ohio plants.* March 12, 2008.

U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). *Annual Alliance Report, OSHA Columbus and Toledo Area Offices, Honda of America MFG., Inc.* May 5, 2009. (Report prepared by Columbus Area Office CAS Howard Eberts and Toledo Area Office CAS Charles Shelton)