

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Budget Estimates

31 May – 2 June 2011

Question No: BET 40

Topic: Exercise Break software

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Xenophon asked:

1. Apart from tendering out for a COTS pause (Exercise Break) software program for your staff, what other measures are being incorporated in their day to minimize risk to their health and well being?
2. Why were all these issues not addressed before the roll out?

Answer:

1. The ATO places a high importance on maintaining a safe and healthy work environment and a productive workforce. The ATO's health and safety management system is built on a risk-management framework with the principle that prevention is everyone's business. The framework integrates the activities of prevention, early intervention and case management.

There are specific policies and practices to encourage employees to take regular rest/recuperative breaks from keying, mousing and screen use. In addition, for all systems in use there are short cut keys that can be used instead of mousing and scrolling through the systems.

In addition, the ATO has initiatives around the overall health and safety of its officers including:

- a prevention tool kit which contains a range of corporate services and products available to teams, managers and individuals to use in order to reduce occupation health and safety workplace hazards and mitigate risks,
- 'mind the mind, mind the body' initiative to assist in the prevention of musculoskeletal disorders and psychological injuries,
- induction, education and communication strategies used to raise awareness and promote safe work practices,
- online and 'in-person' learning programs provided by qualified specialists, and
- online individual health assessment tool for all employees.

2. Risk assessments are undertaken prior to the deployment of all new technology in the ATO. In relation to the introduction of Siebel and the commencement of Integrated Core Processing, risk assessments were undertaken at the design and build stage and prior to deployment.

The risk assessments identified that the use of Siebel and Integrated Core Processing have the same risks as using other computer based systems, for example interactions with these systems have the potential for musculoskeletal disorders such as over-use related injuries and visual fatigue.

Musculoskeletal disorders risks have been and continue to be addressed through the promotion and use of short cut and speed keys to minimise keying and mousing, taking of recuperative (rest) breaks, and the use of software to remind employees to take breaks to minimise the likelihood of injury.

Visual fatigue has been and continues to be addressed through the availability of eyesight testing for visually demanding tasks. If prescribed, the ATO pays for spectacles for employees. To manage visual fatigue employees are encouraged to have micro-pauses to rest their eyes by looking away from the screen and altering their focal distance. This is part of the recuperative breaks regime the ATO promotes to employees.

The use of these approaches to minimise risks has proved to be effective as there has been no increase in the number of claims lodged for conditions associated with computer use.