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Introduction to the special section on environmental design

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The idea for this special section started during the Environmental Design Technical Group (EDTG) meeting at the 2023 Human Factors and Ergonomics Society's (HFES) annual conference in Washington, DC, USA. The group discussed how to engage more researchers and practitioners, and one member expressed curiosity about whether people truly understood the expansive nature of environmental design research. Thus, a special issue was proposed to highlight these differences.

Multiple societies address the concept of Environmental Design. For example, the Environmental Design Research Association defines its purpose as advancing and disseminating works about the relationships among people, their built environments, and natural ecosystems.¹ HFES's EDTG's mission is to foster and encourage the integration of Human Factors and Ergonomics (HFE) principles into designing all built environments as critical components of work systems.²

In 2016, a special issue on environmental design was published in the journal *WORK*, including papers covering offices, healthcare, automobiles, aircraft, and ships.³ In the current special section, the included papers discuss advances related to the work-home experience in light of the remote work movement following the COVID-19 pandemic (See Egan et al.), ergonomic interventions in fatigue and musculoskeletal symptoms of students (See Depreli et al.), the role of vegetation in improving office environments (See Zhang et al.), the influence of environmental design principles on enhancing physiotherapy departments to prevent work-related musculoskeletal disorders (See Kakaraparthi et al.), and the intersection between road safety and age-related driving challenges (See Entezarizarch et al.).

Given the endless combinations of populations, environments, and ecosystems that can be assessed with environmental design principles, works related to this topic can be filtered into other industry-specific groups at conferences and within journals. Consequently, they may not receive the same level of attention as if submitted to a group explicitly focused on environmental design. Therefore, the recent leadership of the EDTG in HFES has decided to emphasize one specific industry this year to showcase and advocate for the significance of HFE in environmental design. In 2025, we identified healthcare as the target industry, aiming to facilitate focused discussions on current research and future research at the intersection of environmental design and healthcare. In the coming years, we will highlight other industries and environments to continue promoting HFE in environmental design.

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