

REDUCING WORKPLACE ERGONOMIC-RELATED INJURIES

Workplace ergonomic-related injuries are responsible for 42 per cent of all lost-time injuries, causing serious pain and suffering for workers in Ontario and economic loss for employers.

Workplace ergonomic-related injuries are also known as musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI), Cumulative Trauma Disorder (CTD) and Repetitive Motion Injury (RMI). These types of injuries can develop as a result of the cumulative effects of repetitive, stressful or awkward movements on bones, joints, ligaments and other soft tissues.

For the period 1996-2004, the direct and indirect cost of ergonomic-related injuries was approximately \$12 billion.

The Impact of Workplace Pains and Strains

Ergonomic-related injuries not only affect the health of workers in Ontario, they also create a huge financial cost for employers. Injuries can:

- Reduce workplace efficiency
- Create the need for additional training
- Result in higher administrative costs and lower productivity and profits.

As with most health and safety hazards, it is less expensive to prevent ergonomic-related injuries than it is to compensate workers and treat them once they occur – prevention is the key.

The Pains and Strains Campaign

As part of the government's plan to reduce workplace injuries by 20 per cent by 2008, the Ministry of Labour is working with its health and safety partners to act on recommendations made by the Ergonomics Advisory Panel.

The Pains and Strains Campaign includes the implementation of these recommendations.

Initial steps to address ergonomic-related injuries began in February 2005, with the creation of the Ergonomics Advisory Panel – consisting of employer and worker representatives – to study ergonomic issues and recommend preventive strategies.

On September 29, 2005 the Ergonomics Sub-Committee presented a preliminary report to the Minister, with recommendations and preventive strategies.

After reviewing the report, the ministry is acting on the sub-committee's recommendations. The ministry has outlined immediate, medium- and long-term steps. Work on other recommendations is currently underway by other health and safety partners.

Immediate Steps

Employers have a duty under the Occupational Health and Safety Act to take every reasonable precaution to protect workers from injury; this includes protecting against ergonomic-related hazards.

Initially, the ministry will focus on raising employer and worker awareness of ergonomic-related injuries and risk factors in high-risk workplaces in the industrial and health care sectors by providing information and discussing ergonomic hazards. This will help workplaces identify ergonomic-related issues and take preventive steps.

The ministry worked with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) and the Safe Workplace Associations (SWAs) to develop an information sheet on ergonomic-related injuries in the workplace. The information sheet, designed to help employers and workers identify and prevent musculoskeletal disorders, is available at: www.labour.gov.on.ca.

Medium-Term Steps

By the end of March 2006, ministry health and safety inspectors responsible for high-risk inspections will complete basic training in ergonomics. In April 2006, inspectors will start to include awareness of ergonomic risk factors in initial inspections and enforcement at high-risk workplaces in industrial and health care sectors. The ministry will also enhance its mechanisms for tracking ergonomic-related inspections.

Long-Term Initiatives

Over 18 months, the ministry will expand on its immediate and medium-term activities. Health and safety inspectors will receive enhanced ergonomics training. This will allow inspectors to identify ergonomic hazards as part of an inspection and when necessary issue orders.

The ministry will work with the WSIB and the SWAs to develop more detailed ergonomic-related information in the form of guidance materials.

The ministry will increase its level of ergonomic expertise, to ensure it has the necessary technical resources to support field activities.

Ergonomics Advisory Panel Members

John Macnamara
President, Business Council on Occupational Health and Safety

Mark Nantais
President, Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers' Association

Maureen Shaw
President and CEO, Industrial Accident Prevention Association

Nancy Hutchison
District Six Safety, Health and Environment Coordinator, United Steelworkers of America,
Canadian National Office

Wayne Samuelson
President, Ontario Federation of Labour

Cathy Walker
National Health and Safety Director, Canadian Auto Workers

-30-

Contact:
Belinda Sutton
Ministry of Labour
416-326-7405

Disponible en français

www.labour.gov.on.ca