

Towards Prevention

Why prevention?

Occupational injuries to muscles, nerves and tendons may not be life-ending, but they can certainly be life-altering. They can change everything. They can rob workers of their mobility and their dignity. Workers are often left unable to care for themselves or those they love.

This is the hard reality of many. Across Canada 2.3 million people – mostly workers – or one in every 10 adults suffer from these injuries also known as musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) or repetitive strain injuries (RSIs). Beyond the social, emotional and economic costs to affected individuals are the economic costs to us all, which add up to \$26 billion every year, much of it paid, not by employers operating unsafe workplaces, but by Canadian taxpayers for health care expenses and income assistance to workers with these injuries.

In Ontario, MSDs are the number one type of lost-time claim reported to the Workplace Safety & Insurance Board (WSIB). They too result in major direct and indirect costs. From 1996 to 2004, WSIB approved more than 382,000 MSD-related, lost-time claims, representing nearly 27 million lost-time days from work and direct costs to employers of more than \$3.3 billion.

Why RSI Awareness Day?

Eleven years ago a few individual workers, all knowing firsthand the debilitating effects repetitive strain injuries (RSIs) or MSDs can have on work and life outside of work, took it upon themselves to ignite a movement to raise awareness of these injuries, their causes, solutions and the need for fair worker compensation. They understood as many do, prevention efforts need to be multi-faceted and sustained – every day of every year. This said, International RSI Awareness Day events, held annually the last day of February, the only non-repetitive day on the calendar, help provide a focus for creating awareness and action on this issue.

What exactly are RSIs or MSDs?

These are umbrella terms used to describe a collection of injuries that affect the muscles, nerves and tendons. Tendonitis, tenosynovitis and carpal tunnel syndrome are some common examples. Common symptoms include aches, pains, burning, tingling, swelling and loss of joint movement and strength in the affected area(s). These symptoms can progress into chronic and crippling disorders which often no amount of physiotherapy or surgery can put right.

What causes RSIs or MSDs?

A variety of factors can play a role in their development including:

- repetition
- forceful movements
- cold temperatures
- pace of work
- vibration
- insufficient recovery time
- awkward or fixed postures
- contact stress
- psychosocial stress.

TRAINING ► THE RIGHT THING. THE RIGHT WAY.



What can be done?

The majority of RSIs or MSDs are preventable. Critical actions include:

- Organization and/or participation in RSI Day events
- Ergonomic changes to work stations, tools, organization and environment
- Worker involvement in these changes
- Effective and enforced regulations by government
- Early reporting of symptoms and hazards to supervisors and joint health and safety committee (JHSC) members
- Suggestions to improve working conditions to supervisors and JHSC members
- Timely reporting to the WSIB of work-related MSDs
- Quality training to address these issues and more.

What can the Workers Centre do for you?

We offer a variety of resources aimed at equipping all workplace parties in all sectors of the economy and throughout Ontario with the knowledge and skills needed to lead ergonomic prevention efforts in their workplace. Resources include:

- Hazard bulletins on a variety of RSIs or MSDs, causes and solutions
- Information on and support for RSI Awareness Day and events
- Specially sponsored community RSI Day educationals of our own
- Ergonomic training programs ranging from three to 30 hours and including the following titles:
 - ✓ Ergonomics: Injuries, Risk Factors and Design Principles **(NEW)**
 - ✓ Ergonomic Toolbox **(NEW)**
 - ✓ Applying Ergonomics to Prevent Musculoskeletal Injuries
 - ✓ Reducing Injuries – An Ergonomics Approach to Patient Handling
 - ✓ Manual Material Handling
 - ✓ Hand Tools
 - ✓ Office Layout and Design
 - ✓ Work Design.

What about RSI Awareness Day 2010?

The Day will be celebrated with a range of events in communities on every continent around the globe. Here in Ontario, the WHSC will support the efforts of worker and community organizations that coordinate community and workplace events in many different ways. RSI Day events will range from simple table-top RSI/Ergonomic displays at work or local shopping malls to community awareness campaigns with local media attention and roundtable discussions held at City Hall or educational institutions.

For workplaces or other groups looking to mark the day with onsite WHSC training, be sure to contact a WHSC Training Services representative near you. In recognition of RSI Day 2010, the WHSC is also offering scheduled training at a minimal fee in locations throughout the province.

To learn more

visit www.whsc.on.ca or call toll free from anywhere in Ontario **1.888.869.7950**.