

## **Workers want Ontario to adopt ergonomic legislation to reduce workplace injury**

Occupational hygienist commonly deals with cancers, breathing problems

By MARIA CALABRESE The Nugget, April 28, 2011

Numbness in the fingertips of a housekeeper's right hand turned into a shooting pain up her arm that would get worse at night.

She lost eight weeks of work when she underwent surgery three years ago to alleviate some of the pain, and she's expecting the same will happen now that she's experiencing similar symptoms in her left hand which are causing her to take over-the-counter painkillers to allow her to keep working.

Thursday is the national Day of Mourning in honour of workers who have been killed on the job or suffered work-related deaths and injuries.

British Columbia and Saskatchewan have taken the lead with legislation forcing employers to make workplaces ergonomic, and Ontario should do the same to reduce hazards on the job, says Andre Gauvin.

He's an ergonomist based in Sudbury at the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers Inc., and was scheduled to speak at a Day of Mourning event in at city hall organized by the North Bay and District Labour Council.

Ontario employers are obligated under the Occupational Health and Safety Act to take every reasonable precaution to protect a worker, but the legislation isn't enough to force employers to make changes in a workplace to reduce unhealthy working conditions, Gauvin said.

"We can do an assessment and make recommendations, but we can't enforce them," he said.

The Workers' Compensation Board says incidents of repetitive strain injury and the number of claims have dropped in B.C. since that province passed ergonomic legislation in 1998.

Employers there work with committees to identify and control risk factors that could lead to injury, and to develop and offer training.

Ontario residents made more than 250,000 injury claims and 342 death claims to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board in 2009, although Gauvin said the number of injuries is much higher since a lot of incidents are not reported.

He said an injury that seems minor could get worse and result in a condition that is more difficult to remedy.

"That's why people should be reporting any injury they have all the time," he said, adding a Form 7 to report injury or disease should remain on record even if it isn't immediately sent to the WSIB in case the condition gets worse and leads to a claim.

Gauvin said there are a lot of work-related injuries in Northern Ontario, including occupational disease with mine and steel plants.

Occupational hygienist Masood Ahmed said he usually sees cancers of the lungs, kidneys, prostate and colon, as well as disease caused by exposure to asbestos including a rare cancer, mesothelioma.

He also deals with conditions that make breathing difficult such as exposure to silica dust from cement or other airborne particles at construction sites.

It's up for debate whether disease is linked to workplaces, he said.

The Day of Mourning begins at 10:45 a.m. at North Bay city hall on Thursday.

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