



ADVOCATES' GATEWAY

Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW), Sudbury,

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LEGISLATION IS NEEDED TO REDUCE MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS

Ergonomics is the science of fitting the job to the worker. When there is a mismatch between the physical requirements of the job and the physical capacity of the worker, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) can result.

Musculoskeletal disorders could be brought on by :

- Repeating the same motion throughout the workday
- Working in an awkward position,
- Using a great deal of force to perform a task
- Repetitively lifting heavy objects

Or a combination of these risk factors could develop into a MSD.

Prolonged exposure to ergonomic risk factors, particularly in combination or at high levels, is likely to cause or contribute to an MSD or aggravate the severity of a pre-existing MSD. Cumulative exposure to ergonomic risk factors, contributes to longer recovery periods.

MSDs are injuries of the muscles, nerves, tendons, ligaments, joints, cartilage and spinal discs. They do not include injuries resulting from slips, trips, falls or similar preventable incidents.

Examples of MSDs include carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, sciatica, herniated disc and low back pain. These account for more than one third of all occupational injuries and illnesses that are serious enough to warrant lost time from work. These injuries are receiving worldwide attention and have prompted some significant legislation and guidelines to address these concerns.

All member states of the European Common Market have ergonomics legislation, as do

Australia and the Scandinavian countries. In Canada, only three provinces have ergonomic legislation in place, British Columbia, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan.

In Ontario, the government legislates requirements for returning injured workers to the workplace, while unfortunately legislation aimed at reducing, or avoiding injuries in the first place is non-existent. Many improvements are being made on a daily basis in workplaces throughout the country. However, without the benefit of enforceable legislation many workers will continue to suffer the effects of back injuries and repetitive strain injuries. In turn the cost carried by employers for WSIB premiums, will escalate.

"An employer shall take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker."

A recent report suggests the federal government is considering amending Part 2 of the Canada Labour Code (2004), which covers occupational health and safety. The amendment would allow the development of ergonomic standards and regulations. In the current the Occupational Health and Safety Act (2004), ergonomics is not mentioned.

Any issue pertaining to ergonomics is placed under the general duty clause in the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Section 25(2)(h) states:

"An employer shall take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker."

It is speculated that there is an increase in MSDs due to increased recognition of the problems, political pressure and the fact that technology is changing so quickly each day while the evolutionary process for humans to evolve is so slow.

The creation of the Occupational Health and

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LEGISLATION IS NEEDED TO REDUCE MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS-CONTINUED

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Safety Act here in Ontario came into play largely through the actions of many people in Northern Ontario. That is something we all should be proud of, but the battle is not over. The Ontario Act makes no mention of ergonomic issues and Ontario needs to adopt legislation as done in British Columbia, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan.

Many of the Northern Ontario advocates who fought for the Act are no longer with us or have since retired. The next generation of workers need to recognize that the battle is not yet over and to continue their fight to lobby for legislation and change.

One strategy that the Ontario government employed was to hire 200 new Ministry of Labour Inspectors. The question of course, is to whom will workplace parties turn to for aid to address the increased number of citations that are created?

Here in Northern Ontario, the number of qualified professionals to assist workplaces with ergonomic and industrial hygiene issues are limited. So while increased orders are written who will help the workplaces implement changes to avoid financial penalties?

The Ontario government has appointed an ergonomic task force as of February 28, 2005. The panel will report back to the Minister of Labour's Office within seven months with recommendations on strategies to reduce ergonomic injuries in Ontario's manufacturing sector. Among others, the sector includes industrial, automotive, retail and restaurant businesses. It is hoped that the Government will be willing to step up to the plate and implement ergonomic legislation to prevent workers from getting hurt in the future.

For more information contact Trevor Schell, Ergonomist ■

ADVOCATE INQUIRY—POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Inquiry Description: Worker developed phobia several months after having received a shock to the arms during an electrical storm. After the accident the employer had him go to the hospital emergency where he was tested over 4hrs and was given a clean bill of health.

Research: There is evidence that a person can develop a phobia after experiencing a traumatic event. In the event of electrical shock due to lightning it has been seen that some people develop storm phobias and post-traumatic stress disorder. In the case of phobias, if there is a traumatic exposure then future avoidance is usual and this reflects the avoidance seen in post-traumatic stress disorder.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a type of anxiety problem. It can occur in persons of any age. It can develop after a life threatening or traumatic even in a person's life. Usually, the event causes feelings of extreme fear, helplessness or horror. After being involved in such an event, many people may have trouble sleeping, have nightmares or daytime memories of the event, feel emotionally numb and cut off from others. For most people, these symptoms usually

stop within a month after the stressful event. However some people continue to have symptoms months to years after the event. The risk of developing PTSD is only 10-25% after being exposed to a traumatic event. PTSD is twice as common in women as it is in men.

Whether a person will develop PTSD depends on how severe and intense the trauma was and how long it lasted. There are also risk factors that may predispose a person to develop PTSD, they include:

- A personal history of mental health problems
- The severity of the stressful event
- A family history of mental illness
- Lack of family and social support after the event
- History of drug and/or alcohol abuse

Symptoms of PTSD: PTSD is extremely disabling. It may develop right after the trauma or can develop months or even years later. PTSD falls into three areas: reliving the trauma, trying to stop thinking about the trauma & anything related to it and feeling "on edge". Some symptoms include:

- Having flashbacks, nightmares, bad memories

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Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a type of anxiety problem.

HEARING TESTING SHOULD OCCUR WITH EXPOSURE TO VIBRATION

Hearing loss, or hearing impairment happens when there is a problem with one or more parts of the ear. Someone who has hearing loss or impairment may be able to hear some sounds or nothing at all. Impairment means something is not working correctly or as well as it should.

The effects of vibration are widespread and can affect multiple parts of the body. The ear is one such part of the body. Literature has shown that there is an association between exposure to vibration and hearing loss. As a result, OHCOW recommends that anyone with confirmed or even suspected exposure to whole body (WBV) or hand-arm vibration (HAV's) exposure

*“Sudbury
OHCOW now
conducting
hearing
screening”*

undergo hearing screening to determine if the worker has indeed suffered hearing loss as a result of exposure to vibration or loud noise sources.

To aid our client's, OHCOW Sudbury will now be conducting hearing screening on any client who is sent to OHCOW for either HAV's or WBV to determine if there has been a change to their hearing. If the screening does indeed detect a deficit, we will refer the client onto one of our community partners for full diagnostic testing. For more information contact the clinic at 705-523-2330 or sudbury@ohcow.on.ca ■

ADVOCATE INQUIRY—CONTINUED

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- or hallucinations
- Having moments when a person feels like the event is happening again
- Having a panic attack when things happen which remind the person of the stressful event
- Not being able to remember important parts of the event
- Avoiding activities and people who remind the person of the traumatic event
- Feeling emotionally numb or detached from others
- Anhedonia (the inability to gain pleasure from normally pleasurable experiences)
- Having trouble sleeping, difficulty concentrating being irritable, angry or jumpy

** It is important to note that sometimes people try to feel better by using alcohol or drugs. This can cause abuse or addiction problems. **

Diagnosis: The diagnosis of PTSD is frequently missed because people do not typically volunteer information about the traumatic event. PTSD should not be diagnosed unless there is evidence that it arose within 6 months of a traumatic event of exceptional severity. A “probable” diagnosis is possible if the delay between event and the onset was longer than 6 months, provided that the symptoms are typical and there is no diagnosis of previous mental illness. Diagnosing the condition requires that the symptoms be present longer than one month.

Treatment: There are many treatments available.

Most often a combination of different treatments is most effective in treating PTSD. Medications for depression or anxiety may be helpful. Stress management courses are sometimes helpful as well. Talking with mental health professionals, family and friends can also help. Other treatments include alternative therapy such as herbal supplements, massage therapy, relaxation therapy, art and music therapies.

Length of symptoms: For at least half of the people who get PTSD, it goes away within 3 months. For others however, the symptoms last for more than a year. In these cases it is important for the person to seek out support groups and to get proper medical attention.

(Summary of a Literature Review done by Christine Bouffard, LUSN IV) ■

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OHCOW — Who We Are? How & Who Can We Help?

OHCOW is a valuable occupational health related resource that is available to advocates and their clients at no cost. The Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) were established in 1989 and are funded by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB).

There are clinics in Hamilton, Toronto, Sarnia, Windsor and Sudbury. Staffed by a multi-disciplinary team of specially

trained occupational health doctors, occupational health nurses, occupational hygienists, ergonomists, researchers and administrators, each OHCOW clinic provides comprehensive occupational health services and information. Our mandate is the prevention of occupational illnesses and injuries. We do this through the identification of the causes which have led to illnesses and injuries. This also provides us with a window into the workplace.

In order to carry out our work we

partner with, among others, public health officials; universities; the Ministry of Labour; the Ministry of Health; the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB); other Health and Safety Associations and organizations such as cancer coalitions. OHCOW works with medical and nursing schools to provide occupational education to medical and nursing students. We also work with unions holding clinics for workers about illnesses which they think might be work related. In short, we have the experience, the knowledge and the credibility to assist you. ■

We're on the web!
<http://www.ohcow.on.ca/clinics/sudbury/>

WHAT'S NEW....?

The Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, Sudbury Inc. would like welcome Heather Potvin to the team. Heather has joined OHCOW as our Information Technician.

Her main focuses will be to get our library and vert files back into shape, so we will be able to provide more information to answer inquiries.

Also WSIB has developed a new form 7 for Employer's to Report a Injury / Disease. There is also a guide available to provide the employer with information on how to fill out the new form 7. The guide and the new form 7 can be viewed or downloaded from the WSIB web-site. Go to www.wsib.on.ca (in the forms menu under employer). ■

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

We welcome feedback for generating topics that would be of interest to advocates. Please forward any question or suggested topics to covered in future issues either by e-mail, phone or fax by using the contact information below. ■

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