

8th Annual International RSI Awareness Day
Wednesday, February 28, 2007

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 and 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?

Eight 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.

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:
 - ✓ Musculoskeletal Injuries Prevention Program (MIPP)
 - ✓ Preventing MSIs: What JHSCs Should Know
 - ✓ 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 2007?

The Day will be celebrated with a range of events in communities on every continent around the globe. Here in Ontario, the Workers Centre 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.

More and more workplaces and community groups are offering training programs, such as the Musculoskeletal Injuries Prevention Program (MIPP), coordinated by the Workers Centre on this Day. RSI Day resource materials developed by the Workers Centre help to define the issue and how workers, their representatives and others can play a proactive role in their workplaces identifying and recommending solutions aimed at prevention. The Workers Centre invites all interested parties to make use of these materials available at www.whsc.on.ca under the Events banner/RSI Day or by contacting a WHSC training service representative at an office near you.

Finally, this year for the first time, the Workers Centre will host a series of cost-free community educationals on the issue of MSDs and their prevention. Discussion will include typical ergonomic injuries, common risk factors at work, workplace solutions, Ministry of Labour enforcement measures and a new Ontario guideline for MSD prevention.

Please join us at an RSI Day event in your community!

For information about events across Ontario

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