

Musculoskeletal disorders— transportation

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) result from repetitive, forceful, or awkward movements and affect bones, joints, ligaments, and other soft tissues. Workers may experience symptoms such as discomfort, pain, numbness, tingling, weakness, and restricted movement. Injuries can include

- back pain, such as low back strain
- muscle strain
- tendonitis
- carpal tunnel syndrome
- rotator cuff syndrome.

The problem in transportation

The transportation industry—and specifically the rate groups of general trucking, lumber and building supplies, and warehousing—clearly need to prevent MSDs:

- The transportation industry has the highest MSD frequency rate of all Ontario industries.
- In 2009 the three rate groups above had a total of 906 lower-back lost-time injuries (LTIs) accounting for 42.4% of all the lower-back LTIs in rate groups served by IHSA.
- In 2009, the three rate groups above had a total of 274 shoulder LTIs accounting for 41.7% of all the shoulder LTIs in rate groups served by IHSA.
- The average cost of an LTI in general trucking is \$42,693.*

* Source: Workplace Safety and Insurance Board

Workers are more likely to suffer an MSD if they perform tasks with risk factors that include repetitive movements, forceful effort, and fixed or awkward postures. Such tasks include:

- Raising and lowering the landing gear on a semi-trailer. If the crank is not correctly maintained and properly greased, the driver may

need to use excessive force to turn it.

- Releasing the main locking mechanism of the fifth wheel, and in some cases a secondary manual lock. This exposes the driver to forceful effort and awkward posture.
- Opening and closing the hood of a truck.
- Loading and unloading the truck.
- Chaining, strapping, or tarping a load.
- Sometimes just getting into and out of a tractor or trailer can expose you to MSD risks.

Furthermore, drivers who spend long hours sitting in a static or fixed position while driving are at a greater risk of developing lower back pain.

Employer's responsibilities

Employers have both a moral and legal obligation to ensure a safe and healthy work environment. It also makes good business sense. Injured workers lead to a drop in production and a subsequent loss of profits. Good work practices effectively pay for themselves as production remains free from disruption, insurance costs are minimized, employee morale is good, and customers get what they need when they need it.

MSD prevention needs to be a key part of a workplace health and safety program. MSD risk factors should be handled like any other workplace hazard.

Employers should

- identify and assess job-related MSD risk factors (do a job/task hazard analysis)
- implement controls to reduce workers' exposure to MSD risk factors
- inform and train workers about MSD risk factors in their job and in the workplace

- encourage workers to participate in the health and safety program by reporting MSD symptoms or concerns early
- follow up to make sure preventive measures are working.

MSD prevention can be simple and inexpensive. Often making straightforward and basic changes can reduce MSD risks significantly.

Resources

The *MSDs in Transportation* web page provides a compilation of presentations about musculoskeletal issues as well as informative resource materials. You get to it by going to www.ihsa.ca, clicking on the transportation site, and then clicking on "MSDs in transportation" in the top navigation bar. Here are some of the important resources featured on that page:

- The new Human Resources Skills & Development Canada (HRSDC) Labour Program guides to MSD prevention. Companies can develop or review their methodology to identify, assess, and control ergonomics-related hazards within their workplaces.
- The *MSD Prevention Guideline for Ontario* and its associated *Resource Manual*. These resources describe a recommended framework for MSD prevention, and help you implement the framework. ●

