MSD prevention for roofers

When stripping material from the roof cavity, the main ergonomic hazard is hurting your lower back. This is due to bending and removing the material by hand. You are also liable to overexert yourself while handling the old roofing material.

Safety tips
1. Use upright scraping tools whenever possible to provide mechanical leverage and reduce the need to bend forward.
2. Use mechanical dollies, wheelbarrows, carts, or buggies to carry roofing materials when possible.
3. Use mechanical lifting, cutting, and removal equipment when possible.
Applying built-up roofing components

Applying built-up roofing components often requires you to bend forward while you are using a screw gun to fasten vapour barriers, protection boards, and insulation. This repetitive bending can lead to back pain. You could also injure your knees or back from squatting and kneeling when you’re working on the floor.

Safety tips

1. Avoid working on the floor as much as possible. For example, use a work bench or mobile table for cutting material.
2. Consider using upright automatic-feeding screw guns. They allow you to work in an upright standing position rather than in an awkward, bent-over position.
3. For roofing membranes longer than two metres, get help to lift long lengths of capping or other accessories.

Lifting and carrying are the main MSD-related hazards for roofers applying roof membranes. Handling propane and torches manually, along with lifting roofing membranes, can cause an MSD.

Safety tips

1. Use mechanical equipment such as dollies and carts whenever possible.
2. Get help from another worker if you can’t handle something safely. Consider the weight of what you are lifting, where you are lifting it, and how awkward your posture is if you try to do it alone.
3. Always use proper lifting techniques—squat down and lift with your legs rather than bending over and lifting with your back. Keep the load close to your body.

Another good way to reduce your risk of developing an MSD is by stretching. You can help prevent injuries by warming up the muscles in your neck, back, and shoulders. It only takes a few minutes. IHSA has a pocket card called “Before You Start Work” that shows warm-up and stretching exercises. Visit the products section at ihsa.ca/products for details. You can also visit the MSD page at ihsa.ca/msds for more information on how to avoid these types of long-term injuries.

Stretch and warm up prior to work

IHSA recommends stretching before work. Getting ready for the job not only means setting up your tools and materials but also getting your muscles ready.

Stretching before work can help prevent back, neck, and shoulder injuries. IHSA has developed a Before You Start Work stretching and exercises card (V012). You can order it by visiting ihsa.ca/products.