

October is Global Ergonomics Month

Global Ergonomics Month is an annual initiative that aims to raise awareness of ergonomics in the workplace and associated musculoskeletal disorder hazards.



In Ontario, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are a leading cause of lost-time injuries. These MSDs include a variety of injuries that can affect muscles, nerves, tendons, ligaments, joints, cartilage, or spinal discs. Workplace hazards that increase the risk of developing MSDs include exposure to high forces, awkward postures, high repetition, duration of work, vibration, local contact stresses, and cold environments.

Ergonomic-friendly workplaces not only benefit workers but they are also good for business. The aim with Global Ergonomics Month is to raise awareness and educate the public on the benefits of adopting ergonomically friendly ways of working. IHSA fully supports this initiative and encourages all employers and workers to incorporate ergonomic-friendly ways of conducting their work on a day-to-day basis.

The effect of MSDs on construction, transportation, and utility companies

Left unaddressed, MSDs threaten the health and safety of workers and overall operational performance of companies. In Ontario, MSDs accounted for 33 per cent of lost-time injury claims in 2020 for construction, utilities, and transportation. Within these sectors, an average MSD claim results in 60 days in lost productivity (113 days for a shoulder MSD) and \$11,000 in medical costs (over \$21,000 for shoulder MSDs).

	MSD Estimates 2020	% of Total Sector LTIs
Construction	1380	31.12%
Electrical	57	34.34%
Transportation	1087	36.35%

*WSIB data schema, March 2021

What causes MSDs?

Exposure to high forces and awkward postures have been documented as the cause for 90 per cent of MSD lost-time injuries in these sectors. The back, lower limbs, and shoulders are the most common body areas affected. More specific to construction and utility industries, a specific MSD known as Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS), which is caused from exposure of vibrating hand tools, is among the top non-fatal occupational diseases.

It is also important to be aware that MSDs can affect all aspects of an organization. Discomfort surveys conducted by IHSA's ergonomist indicate that at least 50 per cent of skilled trades and office workers are reporting severe discomfort at work. In addition, at least 45 per cent of both groups have reported seeking medical treatment as a result of their discomfort at work.

Under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA), employers are required to advise the workplace on any hazards associated with their work and take any reasonable precaution to protect workers (OHSA, s.25(2)(d)(h)). The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development frequently enforces MSD prevention with respect to the employer providing training, instruction, and supervision to the worker (OHSA, s.25(2)(a)). Also, under the Construction Projects regulation (O.Reg. 213/91, s.37(1)) "Material or equipment at a project shall be stored and moved in a manner that does not endanger a worker."

How IHSA can help

IHSA offers a range of products and services to help workers and employers prevent MSDs in the workplace and comply with current legislative requirements.

Consulting and ergonomic assessments

IHSA's ergonomists can help you determine the strengths and gaps with your MSD prevention efforts. IHSA can conduct ergonomic assessments to help your organization better understand your MSD hazards and determine if the controls you have in place are sufficient to protect your workers from developing MSDs.

Musculoskeletal disorder prevention training

IHSA offers several training options that are delivered at your facility to help workers, front-line managers, Joint Health and Safety Committees, health and safety managers, and companies working on COR™ or WSIB's *Health and Safety Excellence* program. IHSA's ergonomics training includes:

- Ergonomics: How to effectively control MSD hazards
- Ergonomic change team
- Specialized ergonomics courses for computer users, skilled trades, and transportation
- Ergonomics: Manual material handling workshop

To learn more about IHSA ergonomic assessments and for a full list of our ergonomics resources, visit IHSA's comprehensive MSD resource page: ihsa.ca/msd.