



# PeopleRight

Human Resources Solutions

## Quick Points:

- **MSDs are high priority for the MOL**
- **September and October are the focus of a MOL Blitz**
- **MSDs are rising and comprise 43% of all lost time injuries**
- **Employer costs in Ontario are now over \$175 million per year**



**“ ... preventing MSD-related claims will save you money ... ”**

## Get Ready for the MOL Blitz: MSDs are the target

The Ministry of Labour is continuing with its program of blitzes under the Safe At Work Ontario strategy. The Ministry states it “created these enforcement campaigns to increase awareness, promote compliance with health and safety legislation, and expand the reach of inspector visits for hazards in Ontario workplaces”.

In 2009, the ministry carried out 10 blitzes, one of which targeted musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). This year they have extended the MSD blitz to two months. For September and October it has announced inspectors will be visiting employers in search of hazards that put employees at risk for MSDs. Typically orders are written to ensure compliance and the ministry performs follow-up visits to determine if compliance has been achieved.

Musculoskeletal Disorders are injuries and disorders affecting muscles, tendons, ligaments and nerves. They are sometimes called Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI), Cumulative Trauma Disorders (CTD) and Repetitive Motion Injuries (RMI). MSDs develop due to the effects of repetitive, forceful exertions such as heavy lifting and carrying, or awkward movements on joints, ligaments and other soft tissues and vibrating equipment that can affect the bones, joints, ligaments and other soft tissues. Some MSD injuries include Low Back Strain, Neck Strain, Tendonitis, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS), Rotator Cuff Syndrome, and Tennis Elbow (Epicondylitis). MSDs can occur in any type of workplace.

### Why are MSDs a priority?

Ministry statistics show that MSDs:

- Contributed to direct claim costs of over \$640 million (6 million days of lost time) from 2003 to 2007,
- Comprised 43% of total LTIs (Lost time injuries) in 2008, up 40% from 2003

These numbers have convinced the ministry that companies must be held accountable for exposing workers to risk factors associated with the development of MSDs.

Many jobs have MSD hazards: things about the job or the way the job is done that increase the risk of a worker developing an MSD. So why are some companies so averse to taking action? Is it because of the perceived costs of changes? Perhaps the perceived time required to implement a prevention program? Some suggest companies don't look hard at preventing MSD injuries as they don't think there is any solution, when in reality there is often an easy and inexpensive one. They just have to be willing to ask for help.

Whatever the reason, a lot of these thoughts are misconceptions about ergonomics. It's all about fitting the work environment to the worker, making better use of the human body's strengths, and limiting the use of the body when it is vulnerable to injury. For example, applying ergonomic principles — reducing repetitive movements, forceful movements, and fixed or awkward positioning — early in the design phase of a new process or task adds little cost, and can prevent many MSDs. In fact, preventing MSD-related compensation claims will save you money.

## Being proactive is good for business

### Blitz goals

The ministry's MSD blitz goals are threefold: 1. Enhance MSD enforcement efforts, 2. Raise awareness of the importance of addressing MSDs, and 3. Identify prevention resources available to workplaces through their safe workplace association.

### Ministry focus

Inspectors will focus on specific key priorities for each sector. For instance,

- **Healthcare Sector:** Inspectors will focus their field visits on retirement and nursing homes, paying particular attention to the tasks of lifting, transferring and repositioning of residents. They will check written policies and procedures, training and supervision involving these tasks. They will also check whether assistive devices such as equipment for patient lifting, transferring and repositioning are properly maintained.
- **Industrial Sector:** Inspectors will focus on retail food sales establishments (i.e. grocery stores). In particular, inspectors will focus on tasks involving the handling of products. These tasks will include the receiving of products, how they are stored on racks, ease of access to all products in walk-in refrigerators/freezers and how products are transported throughout the store. Inspectors will also check cashiers' work stations. Inspectors will check written policies and procedures, training and supervision involving these tasks.

### 2009 Blitz Results

During the month-long MSD hazards inspection blitz conducted in 2009, inspectors visited 1,593 workplaces, including 1,329 in the industrial sector. Some workplaces were visited more than once.

Inspectors issued 4,541 orders. The most common MSD-related orders required employers to

- provide information, instruction and supervision to workers
- conduct a risk assessment
- have a written policy or program for doing certain hazardous tasks
- ensure workers are not endangered when handling materials
- develop measures / procedures in consultation with the joint health and safety committee (JHSC)
- put measures and procedures in writing

### If an inspector arrives

Here's what you can expect: the inspector will perform an administrative review including looking at:

- the Internal Responsibility System
- MSD injury statistics
- joint health and safety committee minutes
- written procedures and training on MSD hazards, signs, symptoms and controls

Employers are required by law to take every reasonable precaution to protect workers from hazards, including those that may result in MSD injuries.

MOL inspectors don't wait for excuses, or even reasons, for non-compliance. The best strategy is:

1. Review, with your JHSC, your history of MSD injuries through accident statistics to identify where the potential risks are,
2. Have a plan to address those risks and begin implementation before the Ministry arrives,
3. Have documentation available to demonstrate any previous efforts you have made to reduce MSD's (lifting training, etc.),
4. Demonstrate you have provided training to all employees on Safe Lifting and Carrying,
5. Get assistance, if necessary, to review your potential hazards and to implement corrections.



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more than 4,500  
MSD-related  
orders in the  
2009 blitz**