



Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day

February 29, 2008

The Canadian Labour Congress calls on all levels of government to take the issue of Repetitive Strain Injury more seriously. Ergonomic regulations to protect Canadian workers from coast-to-coast-to-coast are long over due, as is proper enforcement of regulations where they currently exist.

This call for government action is supported by a Statistics Canada report going back to 2003, indicating that one out of every 10 Canadian adults had a repetitive strain injury (RSI) serious enough to limit their normal activities.

In terms of lost work time and reduced productivity, the cost of RSI to the economy demands action.

Among federal government workers alone, between 11,000 and 17,000 RSI claims are filed each year. The total work days lost each year are estimated between 45,000 and 73,000. The estimated cost: between \$24 and \$40 million.

Broader studies, using a societal approach (regardless of payer) have placed the total cost of RSIs at \$26.6 billion, or about 3.4% of the gross domestic product.

Workers in sales or service, trades, transport or equipment operating, farming, forestry, fishing or mining, and processing/manufacturing or utilities are at high risks of reporting an RSI.

Women's jobs, especially office jobs and micro assembly work, often involve a high risk for RSI which may explain why generally, more women reported a new RSI to worker's compensation boards.

Repetitive strain injury creates significant personal and economic burden for workers and also has a major impact on health care costs, since many of these injuries are not reported to worker's compensation boards.

Work stress deriving from a fast work pace, role ambiguity, worry and monotonous tasks have been associated with RSIs in the past. The Statistics Canada report supports the association between work stress and RSIs.

In 2000, amendments to the Canada Labour Code Part II included the prescription of ergonomics standards in the federal jurisdiction. In 2002, union representatives started to work with government representatives in order to develop regulations on ergonomics.

Today, we have regulations in some provinces and, federally, ergonomics have been incorporated in the Hazard Prevention Regulations. While this is a victory, there is still much to be done to ensure enforcement of these regulations.

We call on the federal government to ensure that the ergonomic regulations which were recently incorporated in the federal Hazard Prevention Regulations, be enforced.

We also call on the government to provide proper training to federal workplace inspectors so that ergonomic hazards are identified and eliminated wherever possible.

We call on provincial and territorial governments to introduce ergonomic regulations if they have not yet done so.

