

Get Ready: April 2009 Safety Blitz Targets Sprains and Strains *MSDs accounted for 43% of all Ontario Lost Time Injury costs in 2007*

It's official. The Ministry of Labour (MOL) has announced that musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), injuries resulting from sprains and strains, will be the focus of its zero tolerance inspection blitz for April. That means businesses most at risk can expect surprise visits from Ministry of Labour (MOL) inspectors looking for hazards that put your employees at risk for sprains and strains. Here's what you need to know, what you need to have in place, and where you can find the tools to help.

Let's start with the numbers from MOL, which are staggering:

- In 2007, 44% of all lost-time injuries (LTIs) in Rate Group 921 (Hotels and Motels) and 26% of LTIs in Rate Group 919 (Restaurants and Catering) were MSDs;
- In 2007, MSD-related costs accounted for 43% of total LTI costs, up from 41% in 2003;
- From 2003 to 2007, the MOL estimates that MSDs resulted in direct claim costs of over \$640,000,000 and in over 6,000,000 days of lost time from work;
- During this same time period, the total LTI rate decreased by 22%, while the MSD-related LTI rate only decreased by 15%;
- Despite the decrease in the MSD-related LTI rate, MSDs accounted for 43% of all LTIs in Ontario in 2007, an increase from 40% in 2003.

The MOL's MSD blitz goals are twofold: to raise your awareness of the importance of addressing MSDs, and to put you in touch with the prevention resources available to you through the Ontario Service Safety Alliance.

Inspectors will focus on ongoing exposure to:

- Tasks requiring workers to use their muscles to exert force to lift, push or carry items;
- Repetitive work;
- Forceful exertions such as heavy lifting and carrying;
- Awkward postures;
- Vibrating equipment that can affect the bones, joints, ligaments and other soft tissues.

Your review should include these tasks and activities:

- Receiving of products;
- How products are stored on the racks;
- Ease of access to all products in walk-in refrigerators/freezers;
- How products are transported throughout the store;
- Cashiers' work stations;
- Written policies and procedures;
- Training and supervision involving the above tasks.

Be prepared: steps all service sector firms can take today

Employers are required by law to take every reasonable precaution to protect workers from hazards, including those that may result in MSD injuries. The MOL's MSD provincial guidelines, announced in February 2007, are clear about employers' obligations.

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

1. Familiarize yourself with soft-tissue injury hazards in your workplace;
2. Perform your own workplace audit; used the checklist below to get started;
3. Have a well-documented MSD program visibly in place, and implement MSD-specific strategies, tools and training;
4. Call OSSA to review hazards before MOL inspectors come knocking; and
5. If you're doing renovations or planning a new storefront or facility, draw on ergonomic expertise to assist with design so that physical demands on staff are taken into account. OSSA can connect you with a qualified provider.

Please call the OSSA Client Service Line at 1-888-478-6772 for guidance and assistance with any of this.

And by the way...

It's a new age of transparency in Ontario's Prevention System. Post this zero tolerance inspection blitz plan on your calendar:

- April 2009: MSDs
- June 2009: New and young workers
- September 2009: Slips, trips and falls
- November 2009: Hazardous materials
- February 2010: Forklifts

Here are the links:

Zero tolerance inspection blitz:

<http://www.newswire.ca/en/releases/archive/March2009/18/c9965.html>

MOL's MSD provincial guidelines: <http://www.wsib.on.ca/wsib/wsibsite.nsf/public/PreventMSD>

Soft-tissue injury hazards: <http://www.ossa.com/content/resources/Painsandstrains.cfm>

Perform your own workplace audit: <http://www.ossa.com/content/resources/keyIssues.cfm>

MSD-specific strategies, tools and training:

<http://www.ossa.com/content/services/ApplyingMSDPreventionGuidelines.cfm>

Call OSSA: <http://www.ossa.com/content/contactUs/>