

As employers, it's our job to educate and train workers about musculoskeletal injury prevention

by Suzanne Jackson, RSA

Musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs) are injuries or disorders of the muscles and soft tissues. MSI claims account for at least one-third of the construction claims accepted by WorkSafeBC.

These injuries may happen suddenly or over time, so it's important to recognize when MSIs are developing to prevent them from progressing into strains, sprains, inflammation, tendonitis or nerve pressure, which can cause conditions such as carpal tunnel syndrome.

Occupational Health & Safety Regulation 4.51 requires employers to educate workers to recognize the signs and symptoms of MSIs. Signs, which can be observed by others, could include swelling, redness or difficulty moving a body part. Symptoms, which can be felt but not observed by others, could include numbness, tingling or pain.

Most often, MSIs are caused by awkward postures such as working overhead or bending, heavy or awkward lifting, or repetitive motions of the elbow, wrist or shoulder. The layout of the work — heights, reaches, standing surfaces, seating, the characteristics of objects handled, as well as environmental conditions — can all contribute to MSIs.

When work is performed at a rate that prevents adequate recovery or does not provide adequate task variability, the body may not be able to recover, increasing the risk for MSIs.

Combining risk identification with training to control risk helps workers to prevent MSIs, regardless of the tasks they perform. Best practices in construction include:

- safe lifting training;
- practising safe postures;
- getting help to move heavy or awkward loads;
- taking short posture breaks or switching from repetitive tasks; and
- using tools with good grips and anti-vibration handles.

Looking for additional MSI resources?

The BCCSA provides a [safe work practice for manual lifting](#) and a [toolbox talk on back injuries](#). WorksafeBC also offers a [booklet](#) to assist employers.