



SAFETY CANADA

The Member Newsletter of the Canada Safety Council

Emerging Worker Safety Risks

What hazards will plague the workplace of the 21st century?

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work has been looking into the occupational safety challenges of the future. Its Risk Observatory anticipates new and emerging risks. In its January 2006 report, the Agency identifies research priorities for occupational safety and health in member states of the European Union (EU). The issues described in that report are highly relevant to Canada.

Psychosocial Factors

The Agency's report points to work-related stress and physical and psychological violence as major concerns. These pressures can add to the chance of a mistake that could lead to a mishap or injury.

Workers are finding it hard to achieve a balance between working and non-working time. Realities such as caring for dependent older relatives, temporary work, or jobs with 'unsocial hours' can contribute to work-related stress. Some also face harassment, bullying, mobbing and even physical violence.

The Agency recommends further study of the changing world of work and its impact on health and safety, as well as development of organizational interventions to improve

the psychosocial work environment. As well, the European Commission has called for research proposals to investigate work-related stress including physical and psychological violence such as harassment, bullying, and mobbing.

An earlier (2002) report noted that "emerging" illnesses such as stress, depression, anxiety, violence at work, harassment and intimidation are responsible for 18 percent of all problems associated with health at work, with a quarter of them resulting in two weeks or more of absence from work. These complaints were linked to work organization, working time arrangements, hierarchical relations, transport-related fatigue, and ethnic and cultural diversity in the workplace.



In Canada, as in Europe, the nature and organization of work are changing, as is the workforce. In this country, mental health claims are the fastest growing category of disability costs. Three-quarters of employers say mental health issues are the leading cause of short and long term disability claims in their organization. Workplace Bullying is consistently one of the most-visited pages on the Canada Safety Council's website; CSC often hears from victims who do not know where to turn.

MSDs

In 2005, the European Agency's risk observatory produced a forecast on emerging physical risks related to occupational safety and health. Lack of physical activity in jobs that are largely automated was at the top of its list. This was tied to an increase in musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs).

Work-related MSDs cause chronic pain in the muscles, tendons, and nerves. Examples are carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, and neck tension.

Activities that are repetitive, fast-paced, concentrated on one part of the body, and/or require awkward postures can lead to these disorders. The effects are more serious when the physical risk is aggravated by psychosocial stresses, inadequate equipment or poor ergonomics.

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Keep Safe When Lightning Strikes

Thunder storms are commonplace in the hot weather. During the summer months, lightning flashes occur about once every three seconds in Canada.

Up to a million times more powerful than household current, lightning bolts can be deadly. Indeed, lightning kills more people in the developed world than any other natural phenomenon. A lightning bolt can cause cardiac arrest when the current enters the body. It can also lead to organ damage and burns, sometimes with long-term effects.

In Canada lightning takes an average of six or seven lives every year and seriously injures 60 to 70 people. The number of strikes is highest in southern Ontario: Windsor receives the most, followed by Toronto and Hamilton. In western Canada, lightning causes about half of all forest fires. Lightning usually strikes higher ground and prominent objects, especially those that conduct electricity — anything metal poses a risk.

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