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PREVENTING MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS: WORKPLACE RESPONSIBILITIES, PARTICIPATION AND SAFETY CULTURE

This fast fact is intended to help workplace parties such as employers, managers, supervisors, workers, joint health and safety committee members (JHSC) and health and safety representatives (HSR) understand their occupational health and safety (OHS) responsibilities and the importance of participation and safety culture in musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) prevention.

MSD PREVENTION

MSD are disorders of the musculoskeletal system. They may be caused or aggravated by various hazards or risk factors in the workplace such as awkward postures, repetition and/or force. MSD are the most common type of hazard in the workplace and a proactive approach is required to prevent these injuries. Organizations should:

- Develop and implement a written MSD prevention policy and program e.g. commitment to MSD prevention and outlines workplace party responsibilities and procedures
- Implement activities to recognize, assess and control MSD hazards and evaluate MSD controls
- Comply with OHS Act workplace party duties, and promote a positive safety culture

Participation, collaboration and cooperation of all workplace parties are also key factors for a successful MSD prevention program.

OHS RESPONSIBILITIES FOR MSD PREVENTION AND SAFETY CULTURE

The Ontario OHS Act outlines legal duties and responsibilities for health and safety for each workplace party. This is referred to as the internal responsibility

system (IRS). This means each workplace party has a set of legal responsibilities for OHS prevention – including MSD prevention. Knowing one's legal responsibilities is not enough to ensure that necessary health and safety changes occur. A positive safety culture can help create positive change.

Workplace culture is related to the set of shared values (things that are important to an organization), guiding beliefs (truths or confidence), understanding and ways of thinking that is shared by the workplace parties and is taught to newly hired workers as the right or correct way of doing things (Rundall et al., 1998). It affects workplace attitudes and behaviours towards safety (Cooper 2000). A positive safety culture requires:

- strong leadership and vision;
- empowerment of managers, supervisor and workers to make positive change;
- collaborative and cooperative teamwork;
- effective communication and change processes;
- trust and respect

All workplace parties can do their part to meet their legal duties and create a positive safety culture for MSD prevention. The following outlines what each workplace party can do.

WHAT SHOULD EMPLOYERS DO TO PREVENT MSD?

- Set MSD prevention as a strategy priority by providing fiscal and human resources to support MSD prevention program development, implementation and maintenance, e.g., appoint a MSD lead and oversight committee; and provide funds for MSD training, education and equipment
- Ensure processes are in place that proactively identify, communicate and address MSD hazards
- Approve and enforce the MSD prevention program policies and procedures
- Ensure the review and if required, revision of the MSD policy and program at least once a year
- Implement MSD quality improvements that have been approved and communicate changes
- Support and consult the JHSC/HSR on MSD hazards, education and training programs
- Respond to JHSC/HSR MSD hazard recommendations within 21 days
- Promote and enable a culture of safety by encouraging manager/supervisor and worker participation, cooperation, problem solving and ownership related to MSD issues and concerns
- Monitor and enforce compliance with MSD policy and procedures
- Ensure health and safety accountability systems are in place
- Take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect workers as per the law

WHAT SHOULD MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS DO TO PREVENT MSD?

- Understand the organization's MSD program and health and safety legislation
- Act as a change agent by collaborating, leading and participating in proactive MSD hazard recognition, assessment, controls (e.g., solutions) and evaluation in areas under their authority
- Ensure all workers understand the relevant MSD policies, measures and procedures
- Ensure workers attend MSD prevention education and training
- Ensure workers that require MSD prevention equipment have and use it safely
- Monitor and enforce compliance with MSD policy and procedures, and maintain records
- Encourage and empower workers to participate in MSD hazard recognition, brainstorming and the sharing of MSD solutions with supervisors/managers and others

- Encourage workers to report MSD hazards and/or incidents promptly
- Investigate MSD hazards and incident promptly, and implement timely solutions
- Communicate MSD prevention changes, concerns and solutions to workers in a timely manner
- Evaluate MSD improvements and seek feedback from workers
- Commend hazard reporting, positive safety behaviours and celebrate prevention improvements
- Take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect workers

WHAT SHOULD WORKERS DO TO PREVENT MSD?

- Attend and actively participate in MSD prevention, education and training
- Follow MSD policies, measures and procedures; and use equipment as instructed
- Report immediately any MSD hazards, incidents or equipment defects to management
- Participate and cooperate in any MSD investigations; brainstorm and share MSD solutions
- Encourage others to protect themselves and follow the MSD policy and procedures
- Participate in health and safety through the JHSC and/or reporting and feedback mechanisms
- Participate in MSD prevention improvement feedback and celebrations of prevention success

WHAT CAN THE JHSC AND/OR HSR DO TO PREVENT MSD?

- Be consulted on MSD prevention policies, program including education and training programs
- Participate in investigations as outlined in the OHS Act and regulations
- Attend the beginning of any health and safety testing related to MSD as needed
- Receive and review occupational health and safety-related reports regarding MSD
- Receive and review MSD accident/illness notifications within 4 days
- Conduct monthly inspections including MSD hazards e.g., awkward postures, force, repetition
- Make recommendations for MSD hazard improvements in writing to management as needed
- Encourage workers to report MSD hazards and incidents to management and share MSD solution ideas with others

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER



The success of an organization's MSD prevention efforts depends on the integration of following elements:

- The development, implementation and continual improvement of a sustainable a MSD injury prevention program and framework that is documented.
- Implementation of systematic hazard management processes including ongoing MSD hazard recognition, assessment and control and evaluation activities.
- A strong IRS with strong leadership, and a positive workplace safety culture - where everyone understands their health and safety responsibilities and everyone demonstrates safe and observable behaviours related to MSD prevention.

These elements must work effectively and efficiently together. For information on MSD and Ergonomics, or to find your PSHSA consultant go to www.pshsa.ca.

REFERENCES

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