



Statistics show too many musculoskeletal injuries in construction

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Construction companies need to improve their training programs to reduce the number of workers getting musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs) from overexertion or sprains and strains.

Statistics from the Workers' Compensation Board of B.C. covering 1997-2001 show that there were more than 30,000 accepted claims in general construction. Almost one-third of those claims were musculoskeletal in nature. The human and financial cost of these claims is just too high. Carpenters and cabinet makers (27%), construction trades helpers and labourers (25%), plasterers, drywall installers and finishers and lathers (8%), electricians (except industrial and power system) (7%), and ironworkers (4%) were the construction jobs with the highest number of MSI claims. Notably, most MSI's occur in the general construction subsector with very few in either heavy construction or roadbuilding.

The average duration of cost of each of those 30,000 injuries was 50 days and close to \$9,000 or over \$88 million in total. But, the true cost of these injuries to the employer is much higher. The WCB has recently developed a tool, the Workplace Safety Calculator, which will help employers understand the complete cost of a workplace incident.

WorkSafe Safety Calculator shows your out-of-pocket costs for an accident

WCB has recently added a Safety Calculator to its website to enable businesses to see the full range of costs of a workplace incident, including training for new or replacement workers, purchasing new equipment and loss of productivity.

When a worker is injured, WCB pays for the direct claim costs, including health, rehabilitation and disability. But injuries cost your business much more that is not covered by WCB. The Calculator lets a business owner follow a common injury scenario, including construction, to see the potential out-of-pocket cost. Or, a company can use its own data, for example from a previous injury, to get a better idea of their own costs.

Costs include lost productivity of both the injured worker and other affected employees, time to investigate how the injury occurred, time to fill out required paperwork, any property damage as well as the cost of replacing the injured worker.

The WorkSafe Safety Calculator can be accessed on-line at www.worksafebc.com, or in CD-ROM format from WCB, Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the B.C. Chamber of Commerce, and some other groups.

Instituting safe work practices, training and orientation programs can prevent many of these injuries.

For more information on preventing injuries in construction, visit our Construction Health and Safety Centre at <http://construction.healthandsafetycentre.org>.

SEND US YOUR IDEAS AND QUESTIONS

I would like to include your ideas and questions in future columns. Send your ideas for future columns to me at dnelson@wcb.bc.ca or call me at (604) 231-8631 or toll free in B.C. at 1 888 621-7233.