

FOCUS

ON OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

MFL OCCUPATIONAL
HEALTH CENTRE

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YOUNG WORKERS AT RISK

Young workers are among the most vulnerable members of Canada's workforce to workplace injuries. Almost by definition they are likely to have less experience and less training than other workers. They are more likely to be working in part-time positions, in sectors of the economy that are not well-regulated or unionized.

When they are injured they are not likely to think of their injury as work-related and are quite likely to blame themselves.

According to the most recent statistics from the Manitoba Workers Compensation Board, workers between the ages of 20 and 24 are more likely to be off work due to an injury than any other group of workers. Seventy-five of every one thousand workers between those ages are likely to experience a time loss injury each year, compared to 45 of every thousand workers between 45 to 54.

The death of a 15-year-old boy on an Alberta construction site this past summer raised questions about the types of work young people are being allowed to undertake and the training they receive.

GETTING YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED

The voices of young workers are usually absent from any discussion of workplace health and safety. In an effort to bring young workers into the debate a conference on Youth Health and Safety in the Workplace was held in Ottawa this past fall. The conference was sponsored by a variety of federal and provincial agencies, corporations and unions.

The MFL Occupational Health Centre's ergonomist, Nermin Helal, attended the conference. She said that many of the people at the meeting were young workers from across the country. Some had been injured on the job, while the lives of others had been touched by on-the-job injuries.



Young workers often find themselves in difficult positions for which they have little training.

"In their recommendations they emphasized the need for training and for educating young workers about their rights. Many described situations where they had to undertake tasks that they were not trained for. They often felt that they had few options."

WORKERS OF TOMORROW

One of the few programs in Manitoba to address this issue is the Workers of Tomorrow. Supported by the Manitoba Workers Compensation Board, the Winnipeg Boys and Girls Club, the Manitoba Federation of Labour, and a variety of local trade unions, the program educates young people about the risks they face and the protections to which they are entitled.

Volunteer speakers, many of whom are themselves young workers who have been injured on the job, speak to thousands of Manitoba students each year. Program director Ellen Olfert said "We try to help students understand that there are risks out there and try to give them some skills to identify those risks. We stress that they should not assume that employers have put in the necessary safeguards."

SOMEONE TO RELATE TO

One of the program lecturers is Jeff Logan, a young metal worker who lost two fingers in a metal forming machine. "I think that I can relate well to the students. They hate having someone come and tell them what to do. But I can come and tell them what happened to me."

He said the majority of students he speaks to tell him that they have had no safety training. "Many of them have been injured, but they do not consider themselves to have been injured on the job unless there has been a major injury."

Logan said, "I try to remind young workers that they should learn from the more experienced workers around them, but not necessarily copy them. I tell them 'The guy who has been there for 10 years will have experience, technique and skills that you do not have. Even if his machine looks the same as yours it may be different. You have to find out what the safest way to do the job is and stick to it.'"

The program stresses the importance of reporting workplace injuries. Logan tells students about how on one job a portion of his thumb was cut off. "The boss told me, 'Say it did not happen at work.' I wanted to show my boss that I was a company man. The young people have to realize that there is a certain point when you have to tell your boss I don't think so."

RIGHTS ON THE JOB

In the same way very few young workers were aware of their rights, particularly the right to refuse unsafe work. Olfert noted that when students are informed of this right, they express anxiety about what would happen to them if they exercised it. "Students say 'It's all right for you to stand up there and tell us that we have the

Continued on page 3

Health and Safety Committee Effectiveness

A recent evaluation of the effectiveness of joint health and safety committees has reached a number of positive conclusions. In particular, the study, which was funded by the Manitoba Workers Compensation Board and supported by the Manitoba Federation of Labour, the Manufacturers Alliance, the Workplace Safety and Health Division, and the Workers Compensation Board's Employer Services, concluded that committee members believe the committees have played a role in reducing the number of injuries and accidents in their workplaces.

The study found that where committees were pro-active and had a positive health and safety environment, compliance with the law was high. As the level of pro-activity dropped off, so too did the levels of compliance and positive environment.

Health, safety and the livestock industry

As the tragic events in Walkerton, Ontario, this summer demonstrated expansion of the livestock industry can present a risk to public health. The E. coli bacteria that led to the Walkerton deaths has been traced back to a well that was contaminated by a nearby livestock operation. In addition, livestock industry workers can face a number of significant health risks.

For these reasons, the MFL Occupational Health Centre has called on the provincial government to ensure that, as the livestock industry expands, appropriate policies are in place to protect both community and workers

The MFLOHC recommendations are contained in its brief to the Manitoba Livestock Stewardship Initiative. The brief identified three specific areas of health risks associated with the industry:

- respiratory problems in animal confinement workers
- the risk of the spread of disease from animals to humans
- musculoskeletal disorders in meatpacking workers.

The brief also discusses some of the determinants of health (for example, gen-

der income and social supports) that must be considered in developing a policy relevant to industry expansion.

Copies of the brief can be obtained from the MFLOHC.

Contact Peter Walker at the Manitoba Federation of Labour at 947-1400 for more information on this study.

MFL Occupational Health Centre Board of Directors

At its annual meeting the MFL Occupational Health Centre elected the following people to its Board of Directors.

Rob Hilliard, MFL
Harry Mesman, UFCW
Peter Walker, MFL
Margaret Day, MGEU
Pat Davis, PSAC
Allen Bleich, CUPE
Wayne Skrypnik, USWA
Jack Alexander, IWA
Ernie McLean IAMAW
Vic Basorowich, UAFF
Rick Lousier, IBEW
Bob Sample, CUPW
Debbie Marantz, CEP
Maria Soares, UNITE
Diana Ludwick, MFLOHC

Editorial

A public-health epidemic

On August 8, 2000, 12 workers were injured and one killed in a smelter explosion at Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting (HBM&S), Flin Flon. The death of Steve Ewing was the 126th work-related fatality at HBM&S since 1929. The MFL Occupational Health Centre joins with the families, unions and the people of Manitoba in mourning the loss of brother Ewing and in calling for an end to the unacceptable carnage in the workplaces across our province.

Manitoba workers are in the midst of an epidemic. The Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba recently announced that it was freezing premium rates for the year while injury rates have increased. Manitoba has the "highest injury rate in Canada of any jurisdiction". Thirteen of every 100 WCB-insured workers in Manitoba are injured on the job. This is a public-health crisis.

The cost of workplace injuries in Manitoba is not borne by the WCB alone. With only about 70 percent of Manitoba workers covered by WCB, a substantial cost of work-related injuries is being absorbed by private insurance, the health-care system, welfare and the workers themselves.

No workers in Manitoba should be put at risk of injury, illness or death when they go to work. Workplace health and safety is an issue that affects all of our society: social clubs, managers, the health-care and the justice systems, and workers' families. Workers' health and safety is not something that is for sale. And failing it is a cost we cannot afford.

Shiftwork and health

Question: With increasing demands of industry and society, more and more workers are becoming involved in shiftwork. How should shifts be designed? What direction should shift rotation be? How often should the shift be changed?

Answer: Good shift organization is important in maintaining and promoting worker health and safety. Humans and other animals have natural body rhythms (known as 'circadian rhythms') that follow a pattern throughout the day and night.

Working rotating shifts has been shown to disrupt these natural rhythms. Researchers have found that, where shift work is required,

rotating shifts in a clockwise direction (days to evenings to nights to days) is better for workers' health than a counter-clockwise direction. A clockwise shift rotation contributes to better sleep patterns, concentration and general feelings of well-being than a counter-clockwise rotation.

Research into how often the shift should change has found that longer rotations are better than short rotations. Changing from a day shift to an evening shift to a midnight shift every few days is too short a rotation and doesn't allow the body to adjust to the new work time. Periods of several weeks or longer on each specific shift are much better tolerated.

Young workers

Continued from page 1

right to refuse, but we'll get fired.'

"We know that is a possibility. And we know that young workers could face a long battle to get their jobs back. But we also remind them that a serious accident could damage them for life."

From the information the program gets from young people it appears that in many workplaces there is little training for young workers in health and safety. "It is not that these are unscrupulous employers. Instead it seems that many employers, particularly those with small workplaces, are themselves not well informed about either health and safety risks or their legal responsibilities."

WHAT NEXT?

Olfert said that there is a need for more health and safety training for young people in the school system. "It is a positive step that the Manitoba Department of Education and Training has a program that is going to be taught by health and physical education teachers."

The national conference on worker health and safety, training programs such as Workers of Tomorrow, and the government initiatives are important steps. However, the dialogue with young workers over health and safety is still in its early stages.

Labour Code Improvements

A number of important changes to the Canada Labour Code (Part II) dealing with workplace health and safety came into effect this fall. The changes increase the influence that workers have on decisions that affect their health.

The major changes to the Act:

- give joint health and safety committee members a role to play in investigating and resolving disputes
- require employers to prevent and

- protect against workplace violence
- improve the protection given to pregnant and nursing women
- call for the establishment of policy health and safety committees in workplaces with more than 300 employees

The Canada Labour Code applies to federal government employees and workers in federally regulated industries such as transportation, communications and banking.



COUNT ME IN!

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Prov. _____

Postal Code _____

Telephone _____

Date: _____

Signature _____

I will assist the Occupational Health Centre to continue to publish the Focus newsletter and purchase up-to-date information for the library in the following manner:

___ a direct donation today of \$ _____

___ a payroll deduction sent directly to the MFL Occupational Health Centre

___ I authorize the MFL Occupational Health Centre to withdraw

\$ _____ from my account on a monthly basis. I am enclosing a sample cheque with the word void written across it, indicating my account number and branch address.

___ a contribution through the United Way specifically designating the MFL Occupational Health Centre

Please return this form (Don't forget your voided cheque) to:

MFL Occupational Health Centre

102-275 Broadway

Winnipeg, Manitoba

R3C 4M6

WINTER SESSIONS

Please note, our educationals will be held on the first and third Tuesdays of the month.

You are invited to the MFL Occupational Health Centre Winter 2001 training sessions at 275 Broadway. Topics relating to occupational and environmental health will be presented by invited guests and staff of the Centre. The sessions are held on the first and third Tuesdays of the month from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.

Phone: 949-0811 • Fax 956-0848 • email mflohc@mflohc.mb.ca

February 6 This session only: 9:00 to 10:30	Workplace Violence -- First Line of Defence	Diane Gantzel Coordinator of Occupational Health Deer Lodge Centre Sharon Seabourne Director of Human Resources Deer Lodge Centre
February 20	Occupational Illnesses Among Hog Industry Workers	Dr. Eva Pip University of Winnipeg
March 6	Case Management at the Workers Compensation Board	Robert Campbell Director Case Management Manufacturing and Voluntary Industries Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba
March 20	Lockout Procedure -- Searching for the Switch to Locking Out	Tony Zienkiewicz Canadian Auto Workers Union Local 3003 Unit Chairpeson New Flyer Industries

The MFL Occupational Health Centre was established in 1982 by the Manitoba Federation of Labour to help Manitoba workers deal with job-related health issues and to assist those in many sectors of our society who strive for safer work environments. The Centre is a non-profit, charitable health centre funded by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and is a member of the Manitoba Association of Community Health and the Association of Occupational and Environmental Clinics.

The MFL Occupational Health Centre has a wide range of health, information, and workplace services available to all workers in Manitoba to assist in determining if a health problem is work-related and how to prevent or reduce the risk of hazardous workplace exposures. The Centre is open Monday to Fridays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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