

## On Occupational Health and Safety

### Voice recognition software becomes a life changing work improvement

#### Voice recognition software converts spoken words to text. You Talk - It Types

"I rallied for the implementation of voice recognition software in my workplace since my hand injury became permanent." For years, Gisele battled with repeated cycles of injury-physiotherapy-recovery. Repetitive keyboarding caused each reinjury to be worse and it took longer for her to bounce back. At first she did not understand why she experienced tingling, numbness and lack of dexterity in her hands and what to expect over time. Soon she needed help from coworkers to even put on her boots at the end of her work shift. Eventually Gisele lost so much strength in her hands and was in so much pain, it was difficult to hold a pen or fork, do up buttons, and open doors. Her injury is now permanent.

Gisele wants others to know that voice recognition software is an option for both

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employers and workers to assist in the recovery, or better yet, maybe even prevent repetitive strain injuries. Gisele is thankful she had the opportunity to

be trained and use voice recognition software at Winnipeg Police Service. She was part of a test group last year and remains happy with this option. "After a lengthy wait for this software to be perfected and adopted within the workplace, it is



"I have my life back. This is not only the software I was hoping for — this is the software I had become desperate for."

everything that I hoped it would be. I believe that any glitches in the system pale in comparison to the financial and emotional costs of repetitive injuries."

This software has also helped others in Gisele's workplace. Many of the clerical support staff work 10 hour shifts with high demands and stress. The need for typing speed and accuracy is crucial. Seven years ago, a new computer system further increased the work demands from

about three to 30 mouse clicks every minute. The repetitive injury rate soared.

Some employees were able to recover and return to their pre-injury jobs but not all. Several years ago the Workers Compensation Board paid for one injured worker to receive 40 hours of voice recognition software training. Winnipeg Police Service installed the software on her computer at work. The benefits were immediately noticed. Twenty staff have now received the training and the software was installed on their computers. Most previously injured workers have now returned to full time work.

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This software also dramatically transformed life for one of Gisele's coworkers. For 27 years Joanne continuously typed for up to 10 hours daily. Gradually she got pain in both arms. At first, her doctor thought the problem was with her shoulders and so she had surgery on both shoulders. The pain persisted over the years, which resulted in surgery to her elbow and eventually carpal tunnel surgery on both hands. Joanne sat depressed at home receiving disability allowance for three years. "Getting out of bed in the morning was a chore as I had nothing to get up for." After training and the software installed at her workstation, Joanne is back at work full time. "Wow — now instead of feeling worthless, I have a sense of pride that I am contributing to the workplace. I'm not an introvert — I enjoy going to work and intermingling with coworkers."

Gisele found learning the software system to be quick. "I am very relieved to be back at

work and I have no pain in my hands as long as I stay away from repetitive tasks. I can put in a full day's work with no pain in my hands when I leave — something I hadn't experienced in years. I'm told that I do the same amount of work (or more) as someone using traditional keyboarding methods." She believes that employers will make huge cost savings as workers return to work again as productive employees.

Gisele adds a note of caution. Using voice recognition software is no different in some ways than keyboarding — it can become repetitive for the voice. She suggests the software be used with traditional keyboarding or to alternate tasks to rest the voice. Others have also suggested that drinking more fluids can also prevent voice strain.

This software is a very simple answer to a very costly problem for the employer.

## Upcoming Events

### Occupational Health Centre's **Annual General Meeting**

June 20, 2011 - Noon - 1:00 pm  
275 Broadway

RSVP your attendance to 949-0811

### **Bike to Work Day Winnipeg**

June 24, 2011

For more information go to

<http://biketoworkdaywinnipeg.org>

### Escalade Training presents **Health and Safety Training for Managers and Supervisors in the Canadian Federal Jurisdiction**

Winnipeg - October 6, 2011

Fee: \$300/person

For more information or to register call

1-866-374-1766 or go to

<http://www.EscaladeTraining.ca>

**SAFE Work Manitoba** presents the following free courses at locations throughout Manitoba:

- **Chemical Biological Hazard Control**
- **Harassment & Violence**
- **Inspecting Your Workplace**
- **Investigating Workplace Incidents**
- **MSI Risk Assessment (Healthcare, Industrial or Office)**
- **Safe Committee Basics**
- **Safe Work Procedures**
- **Safety and Health Program Development**
- **Supervisors and SAFE Work**

For more information or to register call (204)726-6361 or go to <http://www.gov.mb.ca/labour/safety/courses/index.htm>

## Union activist retires and donates proceeds to OHC



Photo: UFCW Local 832

Over \$2,500 was raised for the Occupational Health Centre at the retirement of UFCW activist Mary Johnson in March 2011.

Mary Johnson began her work in the labour movement at Burns Meats. She served as shop steward, plant chair and vice-president of the executive boards of UFCW Locals 111 and 832. Mary worked on staff with UFCW Local 832 for many years as a negotiator and as a union representative. She was also very active in promoting the rights of women within the labour movement.

The Occupational Health Centre wishes to express our gratitude to Mary Johnson for her support of our work. And we wish Mary a long and healthy retirement!

## OHC featured at 2011 Mel Myers Conference

The 2011 Mel Myers Conference held on March 11, 2011 featured OHC's Diane Gagnon as part of a Respectful Workplace Panel presenting information on workplace harassment and bullying. As well, conference organizers donated half of the proceeds from the 2011 conference to the Occupational Health Centre.

The Annual Mel Myers Labour Conference is Manitoba's premier forum for bringing together union leaders and union-side labour lawyers to review and learn about current labour law topics, and to explore solutions to issues impacting the unionized workplace.

OHC extends our appreciation to the organizers of the 2011 Mel Myers Conference for acknowledging our work in these important ways.

## did you know...?

**Radio frequency electromagnetic fields, such as those emitted by cell phones, are now officially classified as possibly carcinogenic (cancer-causing), by the International Agency for Research on Cancer.**

### I want to help!

I will support the Occupational Health Centre to help Manitobans protect their health and safety at work.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ Prov \_\_\_\_\_  
Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your cheque payable to the  
MFL Occupational Health Centre  
102-275 Broadway  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 4M6  
A tax receipt will be issued for donations of \$10.00 and over.

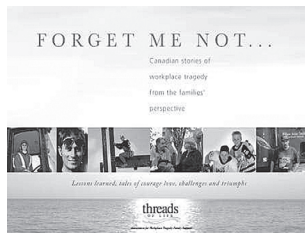


## Newly Released

### FORGET ME NOT . . .

True Canadian Stories of Workplace Tragedy from the Families' Perspective

An easy-to-read, first-hand testimony about family life in the aftermath of a workplace tragedy. Readers will find lessons learned from survivors, tales of personal courage and love, challenges and heart-warming triumphs. Sidebars present facts about health and safety hazards across multiple workplace sectors including construction, industrial workplaces, fisheries, agriculture, forestry, and others.



Safety matters – and this book highlights all the reasons why.

Book retail price \$19.99 plus shipping and handling. To order call 1-888-567-9490 or go to <http://www.threadsoflife.ca/forgetmenot.htm>.

CUPE 2348



Do you have an article, information or story about workplace health and safety that you want to share?

We reserve the right to edit. Send your newsletter contributions for “Focus on Occupational Health and Safety” to Karen Hamilton at [khamilton@mflhcc.mb.ca](mailto:khamilton@mflhcc.mb.ca) or fax: 956-0848

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If at any time you wish to be added or removed from our mailing list, please call (204) 949-0811 or fax to (204) 956-0848.

**The MFL Occupational Health Centre (OHC) is a community health centre focused on promoting the health of Manitoba workers. We are a non-profit, charitable organization funded by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and by donations from individuals and unions. We are committed to working with all Manitobans who are interested in creating safer and healthier workplaces.**

**The OHC provides the following services to Manitobans:**

- **medical services to help you find out if your job is making you sick**
- **education and assistance to workplace health and safety committees to identify and resolve health and safety problems.**
- **special initiatives with immigrant communities**
- **information and library services, Monday to Friday from 9 am to 5 pm**

**Healthy Workplaces Healthy Workers Healthy Communities**