

## On Occupational Health and Safety

# Your BlackBerry could be a pain in the neck

By PAUL TAYLOR

From March 3, 2011 Globe and Mail

### Or hands, or shoulders - new research finds that many who use mobile devices also have experienced pain in these areas recently

A study conducted at the University of Waterloo should serve as a wake-up call for all those who are addicted to their BlackBerrys, iPhones or other handheld mobile devices.

More than 80 per cent of the students, staff and faculty who answered a questionnaire acknowledged feeling some sort of pain during the previous week in their hands, arms, upper back and/or neck. And the greater the reliance on mobile technology, the greater the pain.

“Use of these devices can put you in awkward postures for long periods of time, which could possibly lead to musculoskeletal problems,” said Sophia Berolo, a Waterloo graduate student working on her PhD and lead author of the study.

Thumbs often are contorted into unnatural positions trying to navigate a tiny keyboard. Arms may become fatigued holding up the gadget. The neck gets bent out of shape looking down at the device.

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As it's a relatively small sample of 140 volunteers, the study has limitations. They were recruited through e-mails, websites and

advertisements placed throughout the campus. It's possible that people in pain are the ones most likely to volunteer for such a study. So the results can't be taken as a reflection of the condition in the general public.

“But it gives us some pretty strong clues that something is going on here,” said Richard Wells, a senior author of the study and a professor in Waterloo's Department of Kinesiology.

The study, published in the journal *Applied Ergonomics*, was financed by the Office Ergonomics Research Committee, a U.S.-based industry group formed by computer and furniture manufacturers.

Dr. Wells calls the findings “preliminary.” He said the questionnaire represents one of the first attempts to collect data on the aches and pains believed to be linked to text messaging, Internet browsing and playing games on the ubiquitous devices.

Although more than 80 per cent of those who took part in the study experienced pain, some were hurting a lot more than others.

Almost 48 per cent reported moderate or severe pain (4 to 10 on a 10-point pain scale) in at least a thumb, neck or shoulders. And 15 per cent

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## Workshop geared to workers from the Chinese community in Brandon

This fall OHC staff delivered a workshop in Chinese on Workers Rights and Ergonomics for workers in Brandon.

Seven workers participated in the workshop. Workers mapped their aches and pains on a body map and completed a discomfort survey to document these aches and pains. Participants also explored the risk factors for injury and how line speed affects these risks

During the workshop, workers also had the opportunity to see a doctor from the Occupational Health Centre who specializes in work-related musculoskeletal problems. Interpretation was provided for the doctor's appointments by a local interpreter from the Chinese community. A similar workshop for Spanish-speaking workers in Brandon is planned for later this fall.

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## Dick Martin Award

Nominations are now being accepted for the Dick Martin Award

The Occupational Health Centre presents the Dick Martin Award every three years to recognize individuals who have made a significant contribution to protect the health and well-being of Manitoba workers.

The award is named in honour of Dick Martin, former president of the Manitoba Federation of

Labour, who was instrumental in establishing the Occupational Health Centre in 1983. Dick Martin made occupational health and safety for workers a priority until his death in 2001.

Nominations must be received by April 1, 2012. For eligibility criteria and nomination procedures, please call 949-0811 or go to [www.mflohc.mb.ca](http://www.mflohc.mb.ca)

## Upcoming Events

Safety Services Manitoba  
presents

### **SAFE Work Conference**

January 18 & 19, 2012

For more information call 949-1085 or

Toll free 1-800-661-3321 or

go to <http://www.safetyservicesmanitoba.ca>

SAFE Work Manitoba

presents the following courses on a regular basis every month

### **WCB Basics**

### **WCB Return to Work Basics**

### **Injury Prevention Workshop**

To register or for more information, call 957-7233 or email [safework@wcb.mb.ca](mailto:safework@wcb.mb.ca)

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reported severe pain (7 to 10 on the pain scale) in at least one of those body parts.

“That kind of pain would certainly affect their ability to function,” Dr. Wells said.

More time spent on these devices increases the risk. People who operated one of these gadgets for more than 2.37 hours a day are 3.5 times more likely to experience moderate or severe pain in their thumbs than those who use them less.

Dr. Wells hopes the findings will encourage other experts to look for ways to minimize potential

injuries that could, if left unchecked, become disabling. For instance, propping hands on a desk or another object may reduce neck and arm strain during texting. But such tactics may not be enough to eliminate all problems.

“Anything you can do to cut down the amount of time you spend using one of these devices would be helpful,” Dr. Wells said.

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### What about work-life balance?

Recent research suggests that mobile technology is currently making some lives less flexible and making it harder to maintain work-life balance.

Employees believe that their employers are using mobile technologies to their advantage and do not intend to use these technologies to help employees’ balance their work and personal lives. This means it will likely become more difficult for the individual to achieve work-life balance.

- Middleton, Catherine A. 2007

- Stephens, Paul , McGowan, Matthew, Stoner, Charles & Robin, Jennifer, 2007

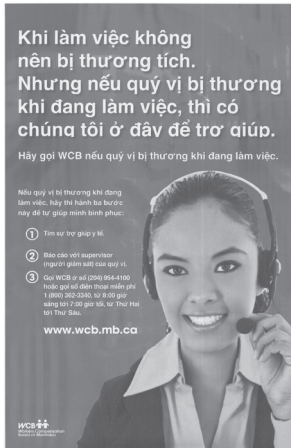
**I want to help!**

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.



# Check out this website...



Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba  
Hurt at Work posters, in 12 languages!

<http://www.wcb.mb.ca/current-publications>

This poster tells workers to follow these steps if you are hurt at work:

1. Find medical help.
2. Tell your supervisor.
3. Call the WCB.

WCB has translated this information for workers injured on the job into 12 languages including French, Tagalog, Spanish, German, Ukrainian, Korean, Chinese, Arabic, Vietnamese, Swahili, Amharic and Punjabi. Translations are all available on their website (scroll down to the bottom of the page listed above).

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@mflfhc.mb.ca](mailto:khamilton@mflfhc.mb.ca) or fax: 956-0848

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**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**