

STATEMENT TO THE LEGISLATURE

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**BY
THE HONOURABLE PETER FONSECA
MINISTER OF LABOUR**

**REGARDING:
TENTH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL
REPETITIVE STRAIN INJURY AWARENESS DAY**

**QUEEN'S PARK
FEBRUARY 26, 2009**

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

Thank you, Speaker.

Saturday, February 28th, is the tenth annual International Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day.

The goal of this special day is to raise awareness of the debilitating nature of repetitive strain type injuries and ways to prevent them.

As a former Olympic athlete, I can attest to the impact repetitive strain injuries can have on the body and one's performance. I can also attest to the fact that — with appropriate precautions — they are avoidable.

Each year we mark Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day to promote avoidance of such injuries, which — while they may not be life-*ending* — can be painfully life-*altering*.

At the Ministry of Labour and throughout Ontario's health and safety system, we use a broader term: musculoskeletal disorders (or MSDs for short) to describe injuries brought on by not only repetitive work but also by forceful exertions, awkward postures, vibration and other physical causes.

But regardless of what we call them, *preventing* such injuries is always better than trying to *cure* them after the fact.

In fact, these injuries *are entirely preventable!*

That's why the Ministry of Labour launched its Pains and Strains Campaign back in 2006 to increase awareness on this type of workplace hazard.

From 2003 to 2007, MSDs resulted in direct claim costs of more than \$640 million and resulted in an estimated six million days lost from work. At a time when Ontario's businesses are struggling with the current economic climate, we need to pay heed to issues that are not only a physical burden but also a financial one.

Ontario has been successful in decreasing the rate of all lost-time injuries (including those related to repetitive strain) by 22 per cent.

However, during this same time period, the MSD lost-time injury rate decreased by only 15 per cent.

Despite this decrease, MSDs accounted for 43 per cent of all lost time injuries in Ontario in 2007 — up from 40 per cent in 2003.

These injuries are taking a tremendous toll, both in human and financial terms.

They are the number one reason for lost-time injury claims reported to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board.

They result in billions of dollars in direct and indirect costs to employers.

And they result in untold pain and suffering for Ontario workers.

We must do better than this! And, indeed, we can do better!

Ontario workers and employers have a **number of** resources to help protect workers against often-painful **MSDs**.

The Musculoskeletal Disorder Prevention Guideline for Ontario — and its accompanying Resource Manual, “Toolbox” **and a website filled with MSD prevention resources** — help to fulfil Ontario’s commitment to reduce workplace **MSDs**.

The musculoskeletal-disorder-prevention “toolbox,” released last year, contains information sheets, sample surveys, hazard identification tools and control strategies.

The web-site contains hundreds of sector specific

examples of how MSD hazards can be eliminated or controlled through innovative designs and workplace practices.

The Guideline provides workers and employers with a framework for preventing musculoskeletal disorders.

The Resource Manual provides in-depth information on implementing the guideline.

It also provides information on understanding and recognizing hazards in the workplace that can result in MSDs — and advice for addressing and controlling them.

These publications have been written by health and safety professionals from the partners in the Occupational Health and Safety Council of Ontario with input from employer and labour stakeholders.

These partners are the Ministry of Labour, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, the Institute for Work and Health and the Health and Safety Associations.

The Ministry of Labour and its partners continue to enforce, raise awareness, produce resource documents, train workplace parties and research the issue of MSDs and how to prevent them.

The ministry's occupational health and safety inspectors focus on education and prevention during workplace visits.

Most Ministry of Labour occupational health and safety inspectors have received training in ergonomics.

Employers have the responsibility under the OHSA to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect the health and safety of their workers, this includes protection from workplace risks that could lead to MSDs.

Ministry inspectors and ergonomists issue orders under the OHSA and sector-based regulations for ergonomic assessments and related preventive measures.

In a few weeks, Ministry of Labour inspectors will enhance their field activity with respect to MSD prevention by initiating an MSD blitz. This "blitz" is one of a series of highly focussed inspections conducted under the *Safe At Work Ontario* program that helps workers and employers anticipate workplace hazards and correct them before injuries occur.

The MSD blitz will be attuned to high risk MSD tasks within the industrial, construction, mining and healthcare sectors. Inspectors will not be directed to

address all potential MSD hazards in a workplace. They will be given specific direction.

We truly believe in prevention. Our government is committed to reducing MSDs in Ontario.

Of course, there remains much more to do. One MSD is one too many . . . especially when you consider that MSDs are entirely preventable.

Whether it is in sport, play or work we must understand and respect the limits of our bodies and through optimizing our working conditions, we will maximize our potential.

We must continue creating positive change.

We must continue to promote a culture of prevention.

If we work together, we can achieve our goal of safer, healthier workplaces throughout Ontario.

Thank you, Speaker.