

International RSI Awareness Day

February 28, 2010 will mark the 11th International RSI Awareness Day - a day set aside each year to focus attention on repetitive strain injuries. Held on the last day of February, it is the only "non-repetitive" day on the calendar and is officially observed on February 29th (in non-leap years, RSI Awareness Day is observed on February 28th.) On this day, workers, health and safety professionals, health care practitioners and others take the opportunity to help raise awareness about RSIs and the need for action aimed at prevention, rehabilitation and compensation.

Repetitive strain injury (RSI) or musculoskeletal disorder (MSD), are umbrella terms used to describe a collection of injuries that affect the muscles, nerves and tendons. Tendonitis, tenosynovitis and carpal tunnel syndrome are some common examples. Common symptoms include aches, pains, tingling, swelling and loss of joint movement and strength in the affected area(s). These symptoms can progress into crippling disorders preventing those affected from working or leading normal lives. A variety of workplace factors can play a role in the development of RSIs including: repetition, work pace, work organization, awkward or fixed positions, forceful movements, vibration, cold temperatures, contact stress, psychosocial stress, and insufficient recovery time.

The work we do at UFCW Local 401 represented workplaces exposes us to this type of injury. Unfortunately, many workers ignore that repetitive work can result in injuries. Some experience pain, but don't address the problem. Left untreated, these injuries can deteriorate and increase the risk of more serious injuries. That's why it's important to be aware of the risks associated with repetitive work.

Many factors can increase the risk of RSIs, such as not taking regular breaks, applying excessive force when doing tasks, performing a task too often or for too long, having poor posture and working in a poorly ergonomically-designed area.

Fortunately, there are things you can do to avoid repetitive strain injuries:

- Take all scheduled breaks, including the lunch break;
- Don't do the same thing over a long period;
- Make sure the rotation of duties is satisfactory and the employer implements it;
- Recognize that cold, or the handling of cold items and vibrations can increase the risk of RSIs;
- Pay specific attention to your posture in the workplace. Poor lighting, shadows and reflections could force you to alter your posture and increase the risk of RSIs.
- Avoid dehydration; drinking lots of water promotes good circulation.
- If you experience problems or pain when doing your work, consult your union representative who will ask the employer for an ergonomic evaluation of your workstation