

## FEBRUARY 28 IS INTERNATIONAL REPETITIVE STRAIN INJURY AWARENESS DAY

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) is joining workers and other labour groups around the world to mark Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) Awareness Day. This day was established 21 years ago to raise awareness about this occupational hazard that affects thousands of people in almost every sector of the economy.

RSI Awareness Day was first observed by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) on February 29, 2000. In a very symbolic manner, that day was selected because it was the only non-repetitive date of the year. In non-leap years, the day is recognized on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

RSIs refer to different types of injuries that affect the muscles in the body, as well as tendons, nerves and joints. RSIs are the most common type of workplace injury in Canada, and tendinitis and carpal tunnel syndrome are the most common types of RSIs.

Some of these injuries can cause permanent disabilities. Unfortunately, many workers are unaware that their aches and pains may be caused by repetitive work. RSI Awareness Day helps raise awareness among workers about this type of injury and the risks associated with repetitive work.

The work we do at Canada Post or for a private sector employer makes us vulnerable to this type of injury. Many risk factors can lead to RSIs, such as applying excessive and constant force when doing tasks, performing a task too often or for too long, working in a poorly ergonomically-designed area, and not taking regular breaks. In addition to internal symptoms, there can be external signs, such as redness, inflammation, difficulty moving or changes in skin tone.

Fortunately, there are basic things you can do to avoid RSIs:

- The most important is without question to take all scheduled breaks, including the lunch break. These breaks are essential for your body.
- Avoid doing the same thing over extended periods. Make sure there is a rotation of duties and the employer implements it.
- Be aware that extreme temperatures, cold and vibrations can increase the risk of RSIs.
- Avoid dehydration. Drinking lots of water promotes good circulation and helps ward off RSIs.
- Your workstation should allow you to work comfortably and maintain good posture. Good lighting is also important.

Canada Post, like all other federal employers, must abide by the *Canada Labour Code*, and, more specifically Part 19 of the *Canada Occupational Health and Safety Regulations*. These provisions state that the employer must develop preventative measures and employee training.

If you experience pain or discomfort while working, report it to your supervisor and insist that a Supervisor Incident Investigation Report (SIIR) be filled out – don't forget that a union representative must be present during the investigation, as per the *Canada Labour Code* and the urban operations collective agreement. Your union representative can also help you ask for an ergonomic assessment to determine if your workstation is the cause. Ask that measures be taken to resolve the problem.

If you feel pain or discomfort, see a doctor and file a claim with your provincial workers' compensation board. Ask a union representative for assistance in filling out a CUPW accident investigation form.

Finally, acting early and quickly can help prevent long-term injuries.

In solidarity,



Marc Roussel  
National Union Representative  
Health and Safety

MR/mps cope 225 gl/cupe1979

