

TEN NEW PROJECTS FUNDED IN RESEARCH PROGRAM'S THIRD YEAR

Funding for ten new projects was approved by the WSIB Board of Directors in the third annual competition of the WSIB's Solutions For Workplace Change research grants program. The total funding for these projects is \$1,680,332.

The ten projects bring the total number of grants awarded under the program since its inception to 46. Twenty projects were funded in 1999, and another 16 in 2000. The total awarded in grants so far is \$7,683,395.

The Research Advisory Council is still reviewing some proposals under the 2001 competition. An announcement on these is expected later this fall.

Among this year's funded projects are an examination of safe working limits for fire-fighters wearing heavy protective clothing, a study of young workers' perceptions of job safety in small businesses, an inquiry into the effects of prenatal maternal exposure to organic solvents on infants' visual processing, and the development of an innovative model for disseminating best practices in

functional assessments. (See the table on page 4 for a complete list.)

The Solutions for Workplace Change research grants program was established by the WSIB in 1998 following the recommendations of a 1997 task force report. In April 1998, the WSIB announced the creation of a multi-stakeholder Research Advisory Council (RAC), who were given the responsibility for implementing the recommendations of the report.

The Council is chaired by Dr. Robert W. Norman, Professor and Director of Ergonomics Initiative in Injury Prevention, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, University of Waterloo.

The WSIB Research Advisory Council issues a Request for Proposals (RFP) each October. The deadline for submissions is January. Grants are up to \$150,000 per year, with a maximum of two years per project.

Please contact the Research Secretariat if you wish to be placed on the RFP mailing list.

THE WSIB RESEARCH ADVISORY COUNCIL

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The WSIB Research Advisory Council in May, 2001. From left to right, front row: Claire Marie Fortin, Linn Holness, Shirley Wylie, Cathy Walker, Steve Mantis, Linda Jolley. Back row: Alice Peter, Bob Norman, Roland Hosein, Ted Vandevs, Terry Sullivan, Dana Tweddell, Gerald Fedchun, Roy Mould, Mariane Levitsky, Perla Scala (Secretariat), Richard Allingham. Missing: Frances Silverman, John Gordon, Sante Mauti, Wolodymyr Lewyckij (Secretariat), Henry Hao (Secretariat).

TIME FOR THE COUNCIL TO LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Dr. Robert W. Norman
Chair, WSIB Research Advisory Council

I have had the pleasure of chairing the multi-stakeholder WSIB Research Advisory Council (RAC) for several years now. The Council, with outstanding support from senior WSIB administrators and a small Secretariat, has undertaken a very difficult task — building an occupational health and safety research grants program for the Province of Ontario from zero.

The RAC decided upon research priorities after consulting with stakeholders in several ways, and implemented a mechanism for soliciting, receiving and awarding financial support for grant applications on diverse and important work-related problems. The grants program is closely monitored by the RAC; its priorities and the granting process are being continuously improved. The quality of the science in the research is judged by an international peer review process that all applicants must pass. The relevance of the proposal to Ontario problems is judged by the RAC.

Considerable progress has been made in developing a validated knowledge source in Ontario that is critical to reaching the WSIB objective of zero work-related injuries and illnesses. We are funding excellent projects. Indeed, the WSIB and its partners acknowledge that no large organization or system can be successful without an effective R&D program and are enthusiastically supporting the research initiatives. The “research” part of R&D is now on an upward swing but co-ordination of the projects and the building of OH&S research capacity are problems to be solved. Moreover, the “development” part of R&D needs nurturing and it is getting attention.

Specifically, the RAC must put mechanisms in place to transform the package of research projects into a solid program of OH&S research. The RAC must also build effective mechanisms for developing research results into products that can be disseminated to and used by employers and workers to reduce or eliminate risk. Fortunately, both an OH&S product delivery system and, to a lesser extent, a research knowledge generation system are in place in Ontario.

The product delivery systems are well-organized in bodies such as the occupational health and safety associations, unions,

employer and employee advocacy groups. They need to and want to transfer the best knowledge they can obtain. Experience is one form of useful knowledge and appears to be the source of much of what is delivered to workplaces currently. However, research based knowledge, including program evaluation, is much more systematically validated and its use must be accelerated. It is important to link the research program and these knowledge delivery organizations more extensively but the issue of the best mechanisms for research development into deliverable products remains to be resolved.

The OH&S research knowledge generation mechanism exists in Ontario, although the capacity is small and must be improved. For example, we are funding projects in a few “centres of research expertise.” Some of these centres have their own network of employers, unions and occupational health and safety organizations. We want to encourage this because the research projects generated by these multidisciplinary teams are methodologically sound, well informed as to workplace relevance, and have built-in knowledge transfer vehicles. But these centres tend to be regional, relatively small and independent of other similar centres.

The RAC believes that networks of these small centres of research expertise can go a long distance in developing a solid, co-ordinated research program in Ontario that will generate validated knowledge and a testing ground for research-based knowledge transfer and use. We need to provide funding to these centres to maintain continuity in their research activities, keep them interested in helping to solve workplace problems rather than losing them to other funding sources on other issues, and link the centres across the province.

Considerable time during the next year will be spent developing at least one such Network of Centres of Research Expertise devoted to reducing work-related injuries and illnesses. If the RAC can implement effective networks of research expertise the impact of the WSIB research initiative on assisting employers and workers in reducing risk, while maintaining quality and productivity, could be enormous.

“Considerable time during the next year will be spent developing at least one Network of Centres of Research Expertise devoted to reducing work-related injuries and illnesses.”

GOOD RESEARCH IS INTEGRAL TO SAFE AND HEALTHY WORKPLACES

Linda Jolley

Vice President, Policy and Research Division, WSIB

"Research must be integral to developing policies and programs for workplace health, safety and compensation."

In 1997, Elizabeth Witmer, then Minister of Labour, recognized that a significantly expanded investment in research on a comprehensive range of occupational health problems was essential in the Province of Ontario.

The WSIB was given the mandate to develop a vision and implement a new research program. The program was to create partnerships with the private sector, universities, research organizations such as the Institute for Work and Health and other bodies by attracting as many good researchers as possible to help solve work-related illness and injury problems.

A task force was created to develop a vision, and a Research Advisory Council (RAC) was set up to implement the vision. Dr. Norman has chaired this multi-stakeholder RAC for several years.

The WSIB continues to be committed to funding high calibre workplace research. This

commitment underlies the Board's belief that its decisions and those of the workplace parties must be well-founded on evidence and that high quality research is an invaluable method of obtaining such evidence.

Research must, therefore, be integral to developing policies and programs for workplace health, safety and compensation.

Funding workplace research is an investment in the future of Ontario's workers and employers. The research funding program is in its third year and will soon see the final results of several of its funded projects.

As the program matures, we can look forward to seeing an increasing number of research results being translated into real changes in how we prevent occupational injuries and illnesses, design workplaces, do our jobs, provide health care, and compensate workers who have been injured or have developed occupational diseases.

RESEARCH TEAM COMPLETES PROJECT, PRODUCES ERGONOMIC HANDBOOK

A one-year research project funded by the WSIB in 1999 has completed its work — the first to do so under the Solutions For Workplace Change Research program. In addition to submitting a final report to the WSIB RAC, the research team has issued a handbook based on its research results for use by workers and employers in the clothing industry.

The project — Dealing with Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders in the Ontario Clothing Industry — was a collaboration by the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE), the Institute for Work and Health (IWH), and the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW). Jonathan Eaton of UNITE headed a research team of Jennifer Gunning, Sue

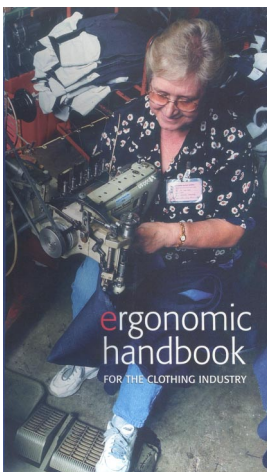
Ferrier, Mickey Kerr, Andrew King, and Joe Matlby.

"Our research project documented and described ergonomic problems and solutions in unionized apparel plants in Ontario," Jonathan Eaton said. "We focused on identifying good practices. Our goal in creating the handbook was to share these good practices, so that injuries can be reduced across the industry. It is designed as a starting point for workers and managers to improve working conditions."



From left to right, back row: Joe Matlby, Judy Lackner, Sue Ferrier, Mickey Kerr, Nello Corsetti. Front row: Jenny Ahn, Jennifer Gunning, Jonathan Eaton.

The handbook, titled *Ergonomic Handbook for the Clothing Industry*, has been shared with all employers participating in the study and with union locals, and widely circulated within UNITE and industry, labour, and health and safety organizations. Copies are available from UNITE, or can be downloaded from the internet at <http://www.unite-svti.org>



"We have received requests from as far away as Malta!" Mr. Eaton says. Also available on the website is the team's full project report.

The research team is now busy on the second phase of the project, "Prevention of WMSD in the Ontario Clothing Industry: A Focus on Small Business," also funded through the WSIB Solutions for Workplace Change program.

Results are expected in early 2003.

"Our experience with the project was very positive," Mr. Eaton says. "It demonstrates the power of creating partnerships between unions, health and safety organizations, and research institutions. It has helped us to advance the issues of ergonomics within our industry, and we intend to keep on pushing."

Congratulations to Jonathan Eaton and his research team for generating new research-based ergonomics knowledge, and transferring the knowledge immediately to workers and employers in Ontario's clothing industry.

PUBLIC FORUM ON KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER BEING HELD IN NOVEMBER

The Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada (AWCBC) will hold a Public Forum on Knowledge Transfer this November 18-20 in Toronto.

The forum will bring together workers, employers, researchers, health and safety practitioners, and decision makers to discuss and present the best ways of transferring research and best practices knowledge to those who can apply it in the workplace.



Glen Wright, Chair of the Ontario Workplace Safety & Insurance Board, and Ralph McGinn, President and CEO of the Workers' Compensation Board of British Columbia, will co-host the forum.

Four main sessions are being planned, with several interactive break-out sessions. The

four sessions will explore the Changing Workplace And Workforce And New Forms Of Injury, Getting Organizational Commitment And Building Organizational Capacity For Using Research Knowledge, Knowledge Transfer Linking Prevention And Return To Work For Musculoskeletal Injury, and Effective Knowledge Transfer: Getting Ideas And Information To Those Who Need It.

The forum will also feature research poster-board presentations which will provide examples of successes in transferring high quality knowledge, and a trade show exhibit.

The forum will be held at the Westin Harbour Castle Hotel. You can register online at <http://www.awcbc.org>. For more information, call the Conference Planning Office at (416) 494-1440, or Brenda Croucher, Executive Director of the AWCBC, at (905) 542-3633.

LIST OF PROJECTS FUNDED IN 2001

Project Title	Principal Investigator and Organization	Amount
Safe Work Limits while Wearing Firefighting Protective Clothing	Tom M. McLellan, Defence & Civil Institute of Environmental Medicine	\$197,903
Maternal Occupational Exposure to Organic Solvents during Pregnancy and Infant Visual Processing	Joanne F. Rovet, The Hospital for Sick Children	\$250,800
Functional & Cellular Alterations to Work-related Repetitive Tasks (1 Year Project)	Howard J. Green, University of Waterloo	\$85,184
Finding the Causes of Low Back Troubles	Stuart M. McGill, University of Waterloo	\$101,208
Mobile Mining Equipment Operator Visibility Investigation	Alan W. Salmoni, Laurentian University	\$125,620
Managing the Health & Safety Interests of Young Workers in Small Business	Huguette Blanco, John H. Lewko, Laurentian University	\$261,032
Reducing Risk of Musculoskeletal Disorders & Promoting Return-to-Work through the Use of Rebar Tying Machines	Tony Almeida, International Association Of Bridge Structural & Ornamental Iron Workers, Local 721	\$42,500
HAVS Impairment & Disability Comparisons Using the DASH Questionnaire	Ron House, St. Michael's Hospital	\$91,760
Benefits and Costs of Ergonomic Change	Richard Wells, University of Waterloo	\$270,756
Towards Best Practices of Functional Assessment: An Innovative Model for Research Dissemination	Susan A. Strong, McMaster University	\$253,569

Westin Harbour Castle
Hotel, Toronto,
November 18-20

To find out more
about us and the
projects we fund,
visit our website
at wsib.on.ca
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