Focus on prevention

SOPHIE DENNIS
Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations

Although Ontario has some of the safest workplaces in the world, we know that more work needs to be done. In December 2010, an Expert Panel released its final report after a comprehensive review of Ontario’s workplace health and safety system. One of its key recommendations was to appoint a Chief Prevention Officer (CPO).

As you may know, George Gritziotis was recently appointed as Ontario’s first CPO and as the Ministry of Labour’s Associate Deputy Minister.

Mr. Gritziotis has extensive experience working with national labour-management partnership organizations in the construction, industrial and services sectors on human resource development, occupational health and safety, and labour market policy issues. He also serves on a number of voluntary community organizations.

Since 2001, Mr. Gritziotis has served as founding executive director of the Construction Sector Council (CSC), a national organization committed to developing a highly skilled workforce that will support the human resource needs of Canada’s construction industry. This includes the development and distribution of apprenticeship, and occupational health and safety-related programs across the country.

As Chief Prevention Officer, Mr. Gritziotis will be responsible for working with the Prevention Council, ministry colleagues and system partners to establish a provincial occupational health and safety strategy. He will work to better coordinate and align Ontario’s workplace health and safety prevention system. With the input of the Prevention Council, he will advise the Minister and Deputy Minister of Labour on strategic priorities.

The CPO has the authority to set standards to enhance health and safety training. Mr. Gritziotis is responsible for working with Ontario’s Health and Safety Associations to establish effective delivery of prevention programs and services.

We are excited to have him here at the Ministry of Labour, and I know he looks forward to working closely with you to help ensure healthier and safer workplaces across the province. We will continue to keep you informed on our progress as we move forward with implementing the Expert Panel’s priority recommendations. Be sure to check back with us on our website for updates.
Fall blitzes focus on workplace health and safety hazards

RENU KULENDARAN
Director, Occupational Health & Safety Branch

It’s been a busy few months for workplace inspection blitzes. Since May, the ministry has conducted seven blitzes in the industrial, mining, construction and health care sectors. These blitzes raise awareness of workplace hazards and help promote compliance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations.

The ministry will conduct four month-long blitzes in October and November:

• In October 2011, the Industrial and Health Care programs will conduct a blitz focusing on Personal Protective Equipment at industrial and health care workplaces.
• Also in October, the Mining program will conduct a blitz on ventilation hazards in underground mines.
• In November, the Industrial program will conduct a blitz on racking and storage hazards.
• In November, the Health Care program will conduct a blitz on infection control in the health care sector.

The ministry uses indicators such as inherent hazards and poor records of compliance with health and safety regulations when selecting workplaces for proactive inspections.

We also continue to provide tools to help workplaces comply with relevant health and safety legislation. With harvesting season in full swing, we are reminded about the importance of healthy and safe farming operations. I encourage you to visit our new website page on farming operations.

http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/topics/farming.php

Inspection blitzes

Since 2008, the Ministry of Labour has conducted 34 inspection blitzes focusing on specific hazards across many industries. Last fiscal year, our inspectors visited more than 14,000 workplaces, issuing nearly 33,000 orders, including more than 2,600 stop-work orders.

Blitzes this fall

Four blitzes are scheduled for this fall, targeting workplace health and safety hazards:

• Personal Protective Equipment – October (Industrial and Health Care)
• Underground Mining, ventilation hazards – October (Mining)
• Racking and Storage – November (Industrial)
• Infection Control – November (Health Care) (see next page)
Although we announce blitzes in advance, individual employers receive no warning of proactive inspections. Results are posted on our website within 90 days of their completion.


Infection control blitz

Fiona Macpate, Health Care Unit Provincial Specialist, Occupational Health & Safety Branch

Health care workers are continually at risk from exposure to infectious diseases in the workplace. In workplaces like long-term care homes, hospitals or group homes, employers are required to develop measures and procedures to protect the health and safety of workers from exposure to infectious diseases.

These measures and procedures should have a hierarchy of controls, including:

- engineering controls
- work practices
- hygiene practices
- administrative controls
- personal protective equipment (PPE)
- and worker training, based on a risk assessment that identifies the hazards.

The joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative must be consulted in the development of measures, procedures and training.

Where workers may be exposed to infectious diseases, the Ministry of Labour works closely with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care; Public Health Ontario (PHO, or formerly known as the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion) and the Regional Infection Control Networks; the Public Services Health & Safety Association (PSHSA) and other partners to ensure that health care workers are protected from infectious diseases.

During November 2011, the ministry will conduct a blitz on infection prevention and control, focusing exclusively on the health care sector. More information about the blitz will be available soon.

The Ministry of Labour developed several resources and strategies to help health care workplaces develop measures to protect their workers. These resources include the Safe At Work Ontario (SAWO) health care sector plan; an infection prevention and control inspection video, and joint partnership webinars with PSHSA and PHO on infection prevention and control.

The ministry receives advice from the Ontario Health Care Advisory Committee – established under Section 21 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act – on a range of occupational health and safety issues, including infection prevention and control. It consists of a committee of stakeholders representing organized labour and health care management associations, facilitated by the ministry. This committee issues guidance notes and recommendations on a range of issues, including infection prevention and control.

For more information about infection prevention and control, please visit:

Safe At Work Ontario Health Care Sector Plan

Loading dock blitz results

In February 2011, ministry inspectors conducted a blitz of loading docks and shipping/receiving areas in the health care and industrial sectors.

- Health Care inspectors conducted 146 field visits to 120 health care workplaces, issuing 239 orders under the OHSA and its regulations, including four stop-work orders.
- In the Industrial sector, inspectors conducted 1,285 blitz-related field visits to 1,089 workplaces and issued 3,233 orders under the OHSA, including 84 stop-work orders.

During the loading dock/shipping and receiving blitz, inspectors checked for:

- Pedestrian and traffic safety in interior and exterior areas of workplaces
- Maintenance and housekeeping of the general work environment
- Immobilization and securing of vehicles against accidental movement
- Guarding and lockout
- Material handling equipment safety
- Safe manual material handling activities

The ministry initially expected to find hazards in workplaces whose primary business is to transport goods and materials. However, the blitz found that workers are exposed to many of the same hazards across all industrial sectors, regardless of workplace size or the business.

The 10 most-frequently issued orders related to the failure to comply with the requirements for:

- Maintaining equipment and facilities in good condition
- Taking reasonable precautions to protect the health and safety of workers
- Examining lifting devices
• Providing workers with information, instruction and supervision
• Addressing work surface hazards
• Immobilizing and securing vehicles against accidental movement
• Guarding pinch points
• Securing machinery, equipment or material against tipping or falling
• Preparing and reviewing health and safety policies, and developing programs to implement the policies
• Posting a copy of the Occupational Health and Safety Act at the workplace

The full results of the loading dock blitz for the Industrial Sector can be found at: http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/sawo/blitzes/blitz_report26_is.php

The full results of the blitz for the Health Care Sector can be found at: http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/sawo/blitzes/blitz_report26_hs.php

The results of the low-rise residential construction (homebuilding) blitz, tower crane blitz, diamond drilling blitz, construction access equipment blitz, and the new and young workers blitz will be posted on the ministry’s website this fall.

Participants at international forum discuss major cause of workplace injury

The Centre of Research Expertise for the Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders (CRE-MSD) hosted a day-long conference in June on manual materials handling (MMH), a major cause of musculoskeletal disorders.

Musculoskeletal disorders are the most common reported injuries in Ontario, responsible for over 44 per cent of all lost-time injuries in 2009. Workers afflicted with MSDs can find it life-altering, experiencing extended pain and financial stress, and requiring medical treatment and time off work. Meanwhile, employers suffer from lost time, productivity and morale.

“Manual materials handling is probably the most important topic for us to address because it contributes to back pain, and those are the injuries that are most prevalent as far as MSDs go,” said Anne Duffy, the Ministry of Labour’s provincial ergonomist, who attended the conference.

Speakers from British Columbia, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia provided insight into their jurisdictional approach to enforcing the control of hazards related to manual materials handling. They also discussed the resources available to their workplaces in their respective jurisdictions. They discussed the assessment methodology and threshold limits that they used, along with obstacles and successes.

More than 100 participants attended the CRE-MSD, including employers, unions, health and safety associations, the Ministry of Labour and other partners.

“We were able to gain great insight from the perspective of a diverse range of stakeholders on manual materials handing, and this will provide guidance to the direction Ontario may take as a system in addressing this issue,” Duffy said.
In the past several years, the Ministry of Labour has enhanced its efforts to inspect and enforce compliance in workplaces where there have been contraventions associated with MSD risks. The ministry has launched two high-profile MSD inspection blitzes that focus on hazards leading to the onset of these types of injuries. MSDs have also been a component in other blitzes. The ministry also created an online interactive tool and fact sheets to help increase awareness of MSDs, while increasing the number of ergonomists on its staff.

At the CRE-MSD conference, many provided feedback about the future of Ontario’s approach to addressing MMH hazards. CRE-MSD will prepare a discussion paper summarizing the MMH forum, which will be available on the centre’s website in the coming weeks.

For those interested in reading the presentations given at the forum, please visit the CRE-MSD website at: http://www.cre-msd.uwaterloo.ca/public_forums.aspx?g=posts&m=52#post52

One number for workplace health and safety calls

Last year, the Ministry of Labour launched a provincial Health & Safety Contact Centre – 1-877-202-0008 – which allows anyone, anywhere in Ontario to call one number to report a workplace health and safety incident, critical injury, fatality or work refusal. Safe At Work Ontario TODAY spoke with Marita Howard, a Labour Ministry EA/H&S Contact Centre manager who worked on the toll-free line’s launch, about the new number.

Marita, thanks for joining us today. What can you tell us about this number?

The toll-free number is a province-wide line to which people can call to report any health and safety incidents, work refusals, critical injuries, fatalities, if they have inquiries about health and safety, or for any complaints or concerns that workers may have in their workplace.

In the past, we had several health and safety contact numbers for the different regions. Last year, we amalgamated all the lines to one number. Today, we have contact centre staff located here in the Hamilton office and in Toronto; however, in the future we will be operating from an office in Hamilton.

Can workplaces call to report, for example, a critical injury after normal business hours?

Yes, 8:30 to 5 are the normal hours of operation for our contact centre staff. But, the line is open 24 hours, seven days a week. If you need to report a critical injury or fatality, someone will be available to take your call.
What happens if I have a concern about an unsafe work practice at a workplace. Can I call?

Yes, you can. Anyone can call into the 1-877 number if they have a concern – workers, members of the public, employers. If you are a member of the public with health and safety concerns about a workplace, you can call that number and a telephone adviser will get the particulars from you. A file would be created and then be forwarded to the appropriate office to look into.

It’s important to remember, though, that if a potential hazard exists in your workplace, your concerns should first be brought to the attention of your employer or supervisor. Then if nothing is done, it should be taken to the worker’s health and safety representative or Joint Health and Safety Committee. If the situation is not corrected, you can call our toll-free number to file a complaint.

Thank you for speaking with us, Marita.

You’re very welcome. Remember, you can call us anytime if you have any questions.

Sector plans

As part of Safe At Work Ontario, the ministry develops annual sector-specific enforcement plans focusing on hazards specific to workplaces in different economic sectors. The plans for the 2011-2012 fiscal year are now available on the ministry’s website.

The plans outline what inspectors will look for in the industrial, health care, construction and mining sectors. Another plan describes the specialized and professional services that the ministry provides, such as ergonomics, occupational hygiene, engineering and radiation protection.

The sector plans can be found at:

Updated ministry guides

The ministry provides guides to help workplaces understand their rights and duties under workplace health and safety legislation. It has recently updated two of its guides:

A Guide to the Occupational Health and Safety Act

The Ministry of Labour has updated its Guide to the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), Ontario’s workplace health and safety legislation. The new edition includes changes to reflect workplace violence and harassment provisions, consolidation of the Designated Substance Regulations and the application of the OHSA to farming operations with paid workers.
A Guide for Joint Health and Safety Committees (JHSCs) and Representatives in the Workplace

Many workplaces in Ontario require Joint Health and Safety Committees (JHSC) and Representatives, who help protect against workplace injury and illness. Read the ministry’s updated Guide for Joint Health and Safety Committees and Representatives in the Workplace. We’d love to get your feedback on the guide, which will inform our spring 2012 print edition.


Links to key resources

- Ministry of Labour home page:
  http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/

- Health and Safety FAQ:

- Occupational Health and Safety Act:
  http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90o01_e.htm

- A Guide to the Occupational Health and Safety Act:

- Court bulletins:

- Safe At Work Ontario:
  http://www.ontario.ca/SafeAtWorkOntario

- Inspection Blitzes, Announcements and Results:

- Sector Plans:

- Young Workers:
  http://www.ontario.ca/YoungWorkers

- Health and Community Care:
  http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/topics/healthcare.php

- Construction Safety:
  http://www.ontario.ca/ConstructionSafety

- Mining Safety:
  http://www.ontario.ca/MiningSafety

- Workplace Violence Resources:
  http://www.ontario.ca/WorkplaceViolence
• Interim Prevention Council:  

• Slips, Trips and Fall Hazards Resources:  
  http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/topics/falls.php

• Musculoskeletal Disorders /Ergonomics Resources:  
  http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/topics/pains.php

• MOL on Twitter:  
  http://twitter.com/#!/OntMinLabour

• MOL on Facebook:  

• Workplace Safety & Insurance Board  
  http://www.wsib.on.ca/en/community/WSiB