

SHOULDERING THE LOAD

Reduce the risk of musculoskeletal injuries associated with log hauling

When we think about being injured at work, we often think of obvious physical injuries that are easy to see, like cuts or broken bones. But in many industries—including log hauling—drivers are at risk of serious job-related injuries that we can't see. These injuries can be as equally painful as cuts or broken bones and can have significant negative impacts on one's quality of life.

Musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs) are one such injury where the risks may be less obvious—but the consequences can be serious. It's critical that truck drivers and employers are aware of how to mitigate the risks associated with MSIs, and ensure they take deliberate measures to prevent these potentially life-altering injuries.

What is an MSI?

A musculoskeletal injury is an injury or disorder of the muscles, tendons,

ligaments, joints, nerves, and blood vessels. Sprains, strains, and inflammation are common MSIs that may be caused, or aggravated by physical work.

Common tasks for logging truck drivers—including long hours sitting in the cab, climbing in and out of the cab, and throwing and cinching wrappers—are all examples of seemingly low-risk activities that can cause significant stress to the body, resulting in MSIs. Factors such as repetition, posture, frequency, duration and force all exacerbate the risk of damage to soft tissues in the neck, shoulders, arms, wrists, legs, and back. The more significant these factors are, the greater the risk of injury.

Throwing wrappers over a load places a great amount of stress on the shoulders and other areas of the body because of the awkward posture and force required to complete the task. While you might not notice an impact right way, risk factors surrounding this activity are

compounded over time as the task becomes more repetitive. The risk of injury also increases as drivers age and see decreased strength and flexibility.

Overexertion injuries are very common among logging truck drivers—from 2013 to 2018 WorkSafeBC recorded 89 overexertion injury claims caused by securing loads on logging trucks. Almost 60 per cent of these injuries occurred while the worker was throwing wrappers; 33 per cent while tightening or cinching the load; and 10 per cent of injuries resulted from removing the wrappers. These injuries occurred in workers from 24 to over 65 years of age and incurred over \$4 million in costs for health care, wage loss, and disability benefits.

The impact of claims cost and lost workdays for both workers and employers is significant—especially when injured drivers have extended recoveries, or if drivers are never able to return to their job due to ongoing health challenges.

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For employers, MSIs mean there are fewer experienced drivers to meet the needs of logging operations—increasing training costs and potentially creating greater risks for motor vehicle incidents. Injured workers with MSIs may see significant impacts to their careers, and potentially their overall quality of life in the form of reduced income and chronic pain, which can lead to mental health issues. Many workers with MSIs lose their ability to enjoy hobbies and daily activities like picking up their child, going on a fishing trip, or tinkering on that old car in the yard.

Managing MSI risks in the workplace

Sections 4.46 to 4.53 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation outline requirements for employers in preventing MSIs in the workplace.

Employers are required to identify potential risk factors, perform risk assessments, and implement controls to

eliminate or minimize the risk of MSIs for workers. They must also show drivers how to recognize early signs and symptoms of MSIs and their potential health effects, and train them in the use of engineering controls, work procedures, and personal protective equipment to control the risk.

Constantly monitoring and evaluating your MSI safety plan and incorporating feedback from your drivers will ensure a safety program that works for everyone. This includes reviewing first-aid records for evidence of MSIs, and consulting with worker health and safety representatives or your joint occupational health and safety committee, if you have one.

Drivers also have a responsibility to understand the risk factors that could lead to musculoskeletal injuries and must follow the controls implemented by their employer to eliminate or minimize the risk of injury. If a job-related activity is causing you pain or seems unsafe, say something.

Are there techniques or tools to reduce the amount of force required to get that wrapper over the load? Is loader assist available to place wrappers on the load?

We all have a responsibility to create safe workplaces and ensure that everyone goes home safely at the end of the day. WorkSafeBC's *Preventing Musculoskeletal Injury (MSI): A Guide for Employers and Joint Committees* outlines the prevention process, including ergonomics requirements and common control measures, and also outlines procedures on how to investigate musculoskeletal injuries. Also, *Understanding the Risks of Musculoskeletal Injury (MSI)* helps employers with the requirement of section 4.51(1) of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, and focuses on educating workers about risk identification, signs and symptoms of MSI, and their potential health effects.

Visit worksafebc.com/ergonomics for more information.▲



Most injuries for logging truck drivers occur when they aren't behind the wheel