

A photograph of George Van Heest, a man with glasses and a headset, smiling at the camera. He is standing at a workstation with two computer monitors. The left monitor displays the BC Ferries logo and some text. The right monitor displays a website with a blue header and a large image of a ferry. George is wearing a checkered shirt and a blue lanyard. The background shows a modern office environment with large windows.

George Van Heest, advisor, customer relations, at one of BC Ferries' stand-up workstations.

Bridging the MSI generation gap

By Gord Woodward

When it comes to protecting people from the most common work-related injury in B.C., today's multi-generational workplaces demand more than a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

Millennials and older workers have different physical needs and mindsets. And that means employers need to make age-appropriate adaptations to training and programs aimed at preventing musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs).

MSIs — soft tissue sprains and strains, mainly — cause more claims than any other injury. The science of ergonomics can be especially helpful in reducing the number of MSIs but even the best science needs to be explained in a way people can understand.

"Ergonomic principles and risk factors are the same whether you're young or old. It's how you deliver the message," says Peter Goyert, a senior ergonomist with

WorkSafeBC. "You cannot have 20-year-olds and 50- to 60-year-olds in the same room learning the same things the same way."

Just ask BC Ferries. Its 4,500-person workforce is a mixture of ages and, as a result, its MSI training employs a mix of approaches.

"It's definitely challenging," says Thomas Proietti, a BC Ferries safety manager in the South Coast. At one end of the demographic scale are older workers, in the last decade of their working lives: people 55 years and above comprise 25 percent of the BC Ferries workforce. At the other end are millennials, aged 37 and under: they account for 21 percent of the BC Ferries workforce.

Each demographic has unique needs when it comes to MSI information, so the company uses a variety of delivery methods. They offer classroom instruction, unlimited access to online resources, on-the-job mentorship, and even personal consultations with an

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in-house ergonomist. Employees can choose the method that works best for them. “We’re trying to promote lifelong learning,” Proietti says.

BC Ferries employees are trained to watch for the four main risk factors for MSIs:

- Exerting force on an object (such as lifting or pulling)
- Repetitive motion
- Awkward and static posture
- Local contact stress (a hard or sharp object coming in contact with the skin)

Equipment is designed and selected to address these risks. Adjustable work desks, for example, allow workers to stand rather than sit for hours. Backpack vacuums reduce the need to bend awkwardly. And new adjustable PIN-pad readers give attendants greater range of motion when swiping, easing the impact of repetitive movement.

Each generation has unique challenges

Even the best MSI program won’t succeed unless it’s tailored to users. For millennials — already 37 percent of Canada’s workforce, and the fastest-growing pool of workers in the country — “we need to create a social buzz and be exciting,” explains WorkSafeBC ergonomist Dina Sikorski. “We need to make ergonomics cool.”

The key, she says, lies in figuring out the millennial culture. “If we understand and know their core values, it will really help us with delivering the message.” And what are those values? Recognition and instant gratification.

Applying that knowledge means classroom lectures are out. In their place: fast-paced online training using lots of video, and constant on-the-job feedback. “Keep your conversations fresh and circle back often,” Sikorski suggests.

Older workers may need accommodation for declining abilities. “Everybody is affected slightly differently by aging,” Goyert says. Generally speaking, muscle strength, flexibility, vision, hearing, cognitive abilities, and breathing capacity ebb as we grow older.

Millennials aren’t dealing with those issues yet, but the children of the technology generation have their own unique problem. “They have developed poor, slouching postures ever since they were old enough to turn on their computers,” Sikorski says. “We have to break those habits.”

For more information on MSIs

Check out these resources on worksafebc.com for more information. You can find them by using the search bar in the top right corner of the webpage.

- [Preventing Musculoskeletal Injury \(MSI\): A Guide for Employers and Joint Committees](#) includes a table of some common risk control options and a chart that can be used to investigate MSIs.
- Sections 4.46 to 4.53 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation spell out an employer’s obligation to use ergonomics to eliminate or minimize the risk of MSI. The sections cover a seven-step prevention process: consultation, education, risk identification, risk assessment, risk control, training, and evaluation.

The next Ergonomics Forum will be held in October 2018. Please see the worksafebc.com events page closer to the date for more information. ☺



WorkSafeBC senior ergonomist Peter Goyert presented tips for baby boomers at the WorkSafeBC Ergonomics Forum last October.

MSI tips for older workers

Here are some ways employers can accommodate older workers:

- **Visual:** Increase illumination. Don't print critical information or instructions in fine print. Use font colours that strongly contrast against the background. Encourage regular eye exams.
- **Cognitive:** Make training as hands-on as possible and allow more time to practise what they're being taught.
- **Physical:** Introduce rest periods for physically demanding tasks. Provide training in back care and lifting techniques. Encourage healthy lifestyles and exercise.
- **Auditory:** Reduce background noise. Don't use high-frequency sounds as alarms. Use flashing lights or a range of lower-frequency sounds instead.

MSI tips for young workers

Here are some ways employers can accommodate young workers:

- **Technology:** Set them up with an ergonomic workstation right away. Minimize exposure to handheld devices, which encourage awkward postures, and use desktop computers with separate keyboards and monitors, as they promote neutral positions.
- **Posture:** Make sure they know how to sit, type, and mouse correctly. "Movement should originate from the shoulder and wrists should float," says Sikorski.
- **Experience:** Don't assume people know how to do certain tasks, says BC Ferries' Proietti. He cites a young worker in a ship's galley who was mopping and using "an odd motion" that was hard on his body. "He had never mopped a floor before. We had to show him how."



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