

# Forest nurseries: Know the risks, prevent injuries

## A guide for employers, supervisors & workers

Workers in forest nurseries repeatedly perform a series of actions over a single workday. These movements — combined with forceful exertions, awkward postures, and other factors — can put workers at risk of developing musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs).

The good news is that employers, supervisors, and workers can prevent MSIs by determining the risk factors and then removing or reducing these risks. Employers and supervisors play a key role by designing safe workstations, equipment, and work processes that incorporate worker feedback. Workers can lower injury risks by ensuring equipment and workstations are a good fit and by regularly communicating with their employer.

This information sheet outlines how each of these groups can contribute to reducing the injury risks in this sector.



The employer sets the foundation for health and safety at the workplace.

### Using this resource

As a forest nurseries employer, you're in the best position to make effective use of this resource. Review the series of individual information sheets for forest nurseries. Share this information with supervisors and staff to get their input on reducing MSI risks at your site, and use it to test improvements to equipment and work processes.

The more you involve workers, the better the buy-in. And that buy-in is reinforced by seeking feedback while testing out modifications. Once these changes are implemented, you'll save time in the long run, and you'll reduce the risks of MSIs in your workplace.

#### Reduce the risk of injury

Here are some suggestions for lowering the risk of injury to forest nursery workers.

#### Employers:

- Design well-lit, functional workspaces with appropriate equipment to reduce force, repetition, and awkward postures, such as reaching or bending.
- Allow for a gradual start to the season so that workers' bodies can adapt. Try starting with half-days, or alternating education and training with time on the job.
- Ask supervisors to create schedules that rotate tasks and reduce repetitive movements.
- Educate workers on the early signs and symptoms, risk factors, and risk control measures for MSIs, including safe working practices and postures associated with their jobs.
- Encourage workers to report early signs and symptoms of MSIs to their supervisors.
- Regularly evaluate MSI prevention processes to make sure the risk controls are effective and address any new risks.

### Supervisors:

- Train and supervise workers to ensure they are setting up their workstations and equipment appropriately and using safe working postures and practices.
- Use anti-fatigue mats at stations where workers will be standing for long periods of time, or consider providing anti-fatigue insoles.
- Create work schedules that rotate tasks and reduce repetitive movements.
- Encourage workers to report early signs and symptoms of MSIs.
- Coach workers on adjustments and adaptations to their workstations, equipment, or techniques.

### Workers:

- Select warm, comfortable, well-fitting gloves with a non-slip grip.
- Use only as much pressure as the task and tool require.
- Keep your work directly in front of you to reduce the risk of twisting. Use neutral postures: straight wrists, arms close to your body, and spine naturally curved in an “S” shape.
- Rest working muscles: Alternate tasks involving different movements and follow the task rotation schedule set by your supervisor. Alternate movements using either side of your body, recognizing that it will likely feel awkward at first, but will improve.
- Take micro-breaks to perform movements opposite to the task (for example, lift your head up for one or two seconds after you’ve been looking down).
- Dress warmly, in layers, to keep your body comfortable.
- Select appropriate footwear with good treads to support the body when standing and walking for long periods of time.



Raising the seedlings to approximately hip height minimizes the risk of MSIs from bending to work with seedlings.



Dressing warmly in layers with good footwear helps to keep your body comfortable.

## For more information

Learn more about reducing the risk of injury by visiting WorkSafeBC’s [Ergonomics](#) page.

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