



## **Action Memo**

**Date:** August 20, 2010

**To:** Local Presidents for Attention of Worker Joint Health and Safety Committee Co-Chairs

**From:** Warren (Smokey) Thomas, OPSEU President

**Re: Joint Health and Safety Committees (JHSCs) Needed to Participate in University of Waterloo "Ergonomic Tool Research Study"**

Dear Sisters/Brothers:

I am inviting worker members of Joint Health and Safety Committees (JHSCs) to participate, with their employer counterparts, in an important research project led by the University of Waterloo.

Musculoskeletal injuries (MSDs) represent the largest cause of lost time injuries in Ontario, representing over 47 percent of allowable WSIB claims. Identifying workplace risks of MSD injuries at the earliest stage possible is essential in preventing these painful and often chronic injuries. Researchers are developing and want to test a new survey tool that measures the ability of worker and employer members of JHSCs to accurately identify ergonomic risks due to physical loads in their workplaces. Physical loads are often related to the development of strains and sprains, low back and shoulder pain, and disability that can sometimes last a lifetime.

Your participation in the project will involve:

### **Pre-Project steps:**

1. Discuss this project with your JHSC worker Co-Chair and other OPSEU members of your JHSC. If your local is interested, contact Terri Aversa in OPSEU's Health and Safety Unit (Tel: 1-800-268-7376 ext 8774 or email [taversa@opseu.org](mailto:taversa@opseu.org)). Terri will collect some basic information about your local and will arrange for a survey package to be sent to you.
2. Receive and review a survey package from University of Waterloo. OPSEU JHSC Co-chair and/or OPSEU members of JHSC will bring the package to their next JHSC meeting to recommend employer support and agreement to participate in the project.

If the employer agrees to participate, then follow the steps below. If the employer does not agree to participate, or your workplace does not have a JHSC, then I thank you for reading this and your role is concluded.

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**The project itself:**

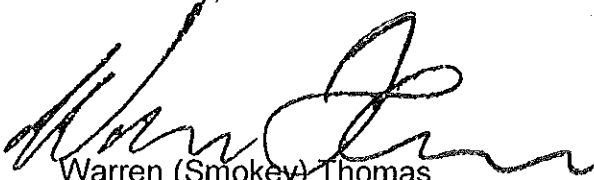
1. The two JHSC Co-Chairs (worker and employer members) will separately complete a questionnaire that should take no more than 20 minutes.
2. The two JHSC Co-Chairs will meet together after they have completed their individual questionnaires will compare answers, and come to a consensus rating on a third copy of the questionnaire.
3. The research team will arrange for an ergonomist visit at a cross sample of Ontario workplaces which may or may not include your workplace. An ergonomist from the research team will visit selected workplaces for one day (at most) to identify physical loads and to talk to workers to better understand the work they do. Each workplace visited will receive a copy of the ergonomist's physical loads report.
4. A researcher will have a short phone conversation with survey participants after the process to get feedback and suggestions to improve the survey tool.

The overall purpose of this project is to find out whether a tool can help two well-informed people such as the JHSC Co-chairs to identify ergonomic demands within a workplace. While I know that your valuable time is already allocated to a host of tasks, I can assure you that your time with this project will be well-spent. Joint employer and worker participation will raise awareness of MSD risks in the workplace. A cross-section of Ontario workplaces will also get a visit and report free of charge from a qualified ergonomist. The ergonomist may help identify new and existing risks in the workplace and also provide recommendations to control physical loads. The report may also provide a good starting point to initiate a formal workplace-specific ergonomics program in your workplace.

I believe there are no disadvantages for anyone who participates in this project. Your JHSC Co-Chairs may end their participation at any time, or can refuse to answer any question. The researchers will keep all information confidential. The name of your workplace or employer will not appear in any article, documentation or reports and will be referred to only by a reference number in final documents. With your agreement, anonymous quotations may be used but will be attributed only to a general title (steward, worker, JHSC member, manager, supervisor), and used in ways that ensure you cannot be identified.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and participation in this very important work to improve health and safety in OPSEU workplaces.

Yours truly,



Warren (Smokey) Thomas  
President, OPSEU

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