

Toolbox Talk

Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs)

Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs) are one of the most common work-related injuries and diseases in NSW, and can have long-term, costly impacts for businesses and workers

Consulting with workers is an essential step in preventing MSDs and ensuring their health and safety at work.

The following information will assist a supervisor/manager/safety professional to facilitate an MSD toolbox talk at the workplace.

Purpose

The purpose of this toolbox talk is to have a brief safety talk about musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and receive feedback from your workers.

Use this talk to pass on important information about MSDs, identify potential safety issues and talk about how to fix them.

The Facilitator

The person delivering the toolbox talk could be a:

- Supervisor
- Manager
- Safety professional

Prepare in 5 simple steps

Before holding your MSD toolbox talk:

- Understand what MSDs are, and the impact they have in your workplace
- As a starting point look at previously reported issues and injuries, high-risk manual handling tasks in your workplace and read the information below in facilitators talking points
- Have a pen and paper (or internal hazard report form) ready to be able to document any concerns/issues raised
- If possible, hold the toolbox talk in a quiet, comfortable and appropriately sized space.
- Allow approximately 15 minutes for the talk and schedule the session at a convenient time

(consider the time of day, number of workers rostered and other scheduled business activities).

- Let workers know in advance that MSDs will be discussed at the toolbox talk.

This will give them time to think about:

- the types of tasks they do on a day-to-day basis
- what types of safety issues (physical and psychosocial) they may be exposed to, and
- any relevant experiences they may wish to share and discuss.

This also gives your workers the chance to think about any improvements that could be made to eliminate or minimise the identified risks.

Now you are ready to deliver your MSD toolbox talk

The below questions will help you deliver a smooth and effective toolbox talk.

1. Firstly, have a chat about MSDs. Get the workers views and opinions on what are the biggest causes of MSDs in the workplace

Notes:

Facilitator talking points

- What is an MSD? –MSDs are injuries or disorders of the muscles, nerves, tendons, joints, cartilage, and spinal discs. MSD is an umbrella term that covers many types of injuries. Some examples of an MSD are sprains, strains, back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, hernias and tennis elbow.
- Main causes of MSDs - the most common causes of MSDs are hazardous manual tasks (HMTs), followed by slips, trips and falls at level (STFAL) and being hit by objects.
- Most MSDs are cumulative –it is the gradual wear and tear from manual handling that takes its toll on the body. Injury can be prevented by firstly being aware of the risk factors and then making changes to the task, the system of work, the work environment or the equipment/plant used to carry out the task.
- Very important -Psychosocial hazards (such as working hours, high workloads, poor job design, pace of work, low levels of control, conflicting work demands) also contribute to the development of MSDs and need to be identified and addressed.
- Highlight any recent changes that have been made that have reduced MSD risk (specific to the workgroup/workplace).

2. Provide some information about hazardous manual tasks (HMT)

Notes:

Facilitator talking points

Go through the definition of a HMT–

A hazardous manual task means a task that requires a person to lift, lower, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain any person, animal or thing **that involves 1 or more of the following**—

- (a) repetitive or sustained force,
- (b) high or sudden force,
- (c) repetitive movement,
- (d) sustained or awkward posture,
- (e) exposure to vibration

(Note: Exposure to these **risk factors** can lead to an MSD)

Explain the sources of risk for HMTs. The sources of risk are the things that cause a risk factor to be present. **Sources of risk** include:

- Design of the work area
- Layout of the workplace
- Systems of work used, including organisational and psychosocial factors (e.g., pace of work, job control and autonomy, safety leadership and culture)
- Workplace environmental condition (e.g., lighting, temperature)
- The nature, size, weight or number of persons, animals or things involved in the task

For example –it may be due to the layout of your work area that a worker is in an awkward posture, or your procedures may impose repetitive movement.

Facilitator tips

- Use a few examples of the tasks performed by the workgroup to highlight what tasks are hazardous, and why.

SafeWork NSW supporting documents:

- The Risk Management Process for Manual Tasks.
- Hazardous manual tasks overview

3. Ask workers about any MSD/HMT concerns or safety issues they have, and how to potentially fix them

Notes:

Facilitator talking points

Ask workers the following questions:

1. Think of the work you do, are there any tasks that are physically demanding, tiring, awkward and/or uncomfortable to perform? (In other words, what HMT risk factors are they exposed to)
2. What jobs/tasks are you most afraid of getting hurt from?
3. What manual handling jobs stop you wanting to come to work?
4. Are there any psychosocial hazards (such as working hours, high workloads, poor job design, pace of work, low levels of control, conflicting work demands) that also impact your work?

Once you have had this discussion, pick a task (or aspect of a task) that the workgroup identified and discuss the best way to fix it.

Facilitator tips.

Encourage workers to think of how they can do their work, but with no (or less) exposure to HMT risk factors (high/sudden force, repetitive movement, sustained or awkward posture, and vibration).

When discussing with workers ways to control MSD hazards, think about the sources of any risk present in the task, work environment and system. These are the things the business should change to eliminate or reduce a worker's exposure to MSD risks. For example:

- awkward postures and movements may be due to the layout of the workplace
- high mental strain may be due to high job demands
- high forces may be due to the types of loads being handled
- the frequency and duration of the task may be due to the work organisation, limited staff numbers or increased work pace to meet tight deadlines, and
- Slip, trip and fall risks may be due to the work environment.

Note - Another good way to identify potential hazardous manual tasks is to conduct a worker discomfort survey, which can be done independent of a toolbox talk. In fact, SafeWork NSW recommends that businesses conduct discomfort surveys with their workers. See appendix E Code of practice - Hazardous Manual Tasks

SafeWork NSW supporting documents:

- Hazardous manual task risk management worksheet
- Worker discomfort survey - Appendix E Code of practice - Hazardous Manual Tasks

4. Finish off by providing information about your internal risk management systems, specifically related to MSDs (i.e., how to report manual handling, slip trip falls hazards and risks)

Notes:

Facilitator talking points

- Explain or reiterate to workers your process for reporting MSD hazards, and how they will be dealt with once reported. If applicable, highlight any recent changes that have been made that have eliminated or reduced MSD risk.

Note:

- Your risk management system should have processes in place to identify, assess and control hazardous manual task and slip, trip and falls hazards and risks.

SafeWork NSW supporting documents:

- The Risk Management Process for Manual Tasks.
- Hazardous manual task system self-assessment tool
- Hazardous manual task risk management worksheet
- Slips, trips and falls system self-assessment tool

Disclaimer

This publication may contain information about the regulation and enforcement of work health and safety in NSW. It may include some of your obligations under some of the legislation that SafeWork NSW administers. To ensure you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate legislation.

Information on the latest laws can be checked by visiting the NSW legislation website

www.legislation.nsw.gov.au

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