# Psychosocial Risk Management
## What Every Business Manager Should Know!

## WHAT on earth are "psychosocial risks"? And WHY do you need to know anything about managing them?

Most business managers have some appreciation of health and safety on the job and recognize that they have a moral and legal duty to keep employees safe and healthy while they are at work. But do you fully understand the scope of what "safe and healthy" really means?

As a conscientious business manager, you have no doubt tried to make sure your employees are not put at risk of injury or work-related illness while they are on the job. But it is now recognized that a workplace can be physically safe and yet still be an unhealthy place to work. Issues related to the organization of work, workplace stress, and the way people are treated are referred to as "psychosocial hazards." Examples are:

- Constant work overload
- Lack of control over how work is done
- Harassment, bullying, or discrimination on the job
- Lack of supervisor support
- Lack of respect for workers
- Lack of appropriate rewards and appreciation for the effort expended
- Lack of support for work-family balance
- Poor communication
- Ambiguity about job responsibilities

Most people know intuitively that these things are unpleasant. But they are also hazardous to the health and safety of employees. Research shows that some of these conditions can increase employees' risk of:

- Back pain by up to 3 times
- Heart disease by up to 3 times
- Injuries like musculoskeletal disorders by 2-3 times
- Substance abuse by 2 times or more
- Infections by 2-3 times
- Certain cancers by 5 times
- Conflicts and violence in the workplace by 2-3 times
- Mental illnesses like depression and anxiety by 2-3 times

Clearly, any company with an increased risk of these conditions will be paying for it in increased workers' compensation costs, absenteeism, short and long-term disability, and decreased productivity.

In addition, there is an increasing amount of litigation occurring in Canadian courts, and growing settlements in favour of employees related to the employer's responsibility to provide a "civil and respectful" workplace or an "emotionally safe" workplace.

The good news is that employers can do something about these issues! Some strategies that have helped companies control psychosocial risks are:

- Encouraging workers to participate in decision-making
- Demonstrating fairness in management style and application of policies
- Minimizing "perks" based on hierarchy
- Training and evaluating supervisors on communication and "people skills"
- Providing flexible work arrangements
- Providing work-life balance policies and practices and a supportive culture
- Showing appreciation for employees' efforts
- Ensuring the workplace environment is respectful to all workers
- Measuring employee satisfaction regularly and acting on findings
- Providing employees with the information and resources they need to do their jobs well
- Addressing work overload issues

None of these strategies are simple or can be accomplished by just spending money or issuing edicts. But, with commitment and understanding from the top, employers can make changes in the workplace that will have a significant impact on employee well being and the company's bottom line. Even individual managers can implement many of these strategies, independently of overall organizational change, and see positive changes in their units.


© Industrial Accident Prevention Association, 2007. All rights reserved.


IAPA
It's About Making A Difference.

## For more INFORMATION

Visit our website at **www.iapa.ca** or contact Customer Care at 905.614.IAPA (4272).

- The Leadership Factor: A more in-depth article also available as a free download. Originally published in the January/February 2002 issue of Accident Prevention magazine.
- The Psychosocial Side of RSIs: A short article also available as a free download. Originally published in the November/December 2003 issue of Accident Prevention magazine.
- Psychosocial Risk Management: This can be a 3-hour workshop or a 1 hour presentation. It is available on request as on-site training.
- The Psychosocial Side of Musculoskeletal Disorders: This can be a 3-hour workshop or a 1 hour presentation. It is available on request as on-site training.

© INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENT PREVENTION ASSOCIATION, **2006, 2007**. All rights reserved.

As part of IAPA's mission to inform and educate, IAPA permits users to reproduce this material for their own internal training and educational purposes only. For any other purpose, including use in conjunction with fee for service or other commercial activities, no part of this material may be used, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recorded, or otherwise, without the express prior written permission of the Industrial Accident Prevention Association.

The information contained in this material is provided voluntarily as a public service. No warranty, guarantee or representation is made by IAPA as to the correctness, suitability, fitness, or sufficiency of any information contained in this material. Use of this material means that the user agrees that IAPA and its employees will not have and are released from any liability whatsoever, however caused or arising, in connection therewith. Users also acknowledge that it cannot be assumed that all acceptable safety measures are contained in this material or that additional measures may not be required in the conditions or circumstances that are applicable to the user or his/her organization, and that the user will personally make his/her own assessment of the information contained in this material.

While IAPA does not undertake to provide a revision service or guarantee accuracy, we shall be pleased to respond to your individual requests for information.

Revised: October 2007



IAPA
It's About Making A Difference.