

EU-OSHA CAMPAIGN TO ‘LIGHTEN THE LOAD’ ON WORKPLACE MSDs

‘Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load’ – the latest two-year campaign rolled out by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) – is focussing on musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), which remain the most prevalent work-related problem.

The two-year programme of events and actions (2020-2022) aims to raise awareness of the most prevalent work-related health issue, and to ensure the best possible work environment for the health and wellbeing of the workforce, and duty of all employers.

Despite legislation and initiatives aimed at preventing musculoskeletal disorders, around three in every five workers suffer from MSDs, and the disorder remains the most common work-related health complaint in Europe, affecting workers in all jobs and sectors.

Repetitive movements, prolonged sitting and heavy lifting are just some of the risk factors that contribute to these conditions, which can affect the muscles, joints, tendons or bones. The negative impact that they have on workers’ quality of life is clear.

Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, said the Commission fully supports the EU-OSHA campaign to tackle the issue of work-related musculoskeletal disorders. “Many of us have experienced backache, stiff muscles or a sore neck as a result of our work. This can severely affect our everyday lives, our productivity, and it can be detrimental to our physical and mental health,” he noted.

Christa Sedlatschek, EU-OSHA Executive Director, emphasised that in addition to the human suffering caused, workers miss out on the fulfilling aspects of their private and working lives.

“Workers with MSDs are absent from work more often and for longer periods, are likely to be less productive while at work and often take early retirement. This campaign will highlight that early intervention and rehabilitation are vital and entirely possible. By working together and adopting good practice now, we can prevent MSDs in future generations of workers,” she added.

FOCUS ON HIGH-RISK SECTORS

Measures to prevent and manage MSDs are often simple and inexpensive, and this is one of the key messages of the campaign, which is reaching out to workers and employers across all sectors, with a particular focus on high-risk sectors, such as healthcare and early education.

Supporting workers with chronic MSDs to remain in work will also be a key focus, along with the need to consider psychosocial risks and worker diversity, and to adopt collaborative approaches to MSD management – involving workers, employers, healthcare providers and other stakeholders.

Special attention will be given to emerging risks, arising from digitalisation and new technologies and ways of organising work. This is particularly timely in light of COVID-19, which has



European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicolas Schmit pictured at a press conference to announce the launch of the campaign in October 2020.

forced many workers out of offices and into working from home. MSDs and home-based teleworking is now a priority area for the campaign.

SIX MAIN OBJECTIVES

Co-ordinated by EU-OSHA’s national focal points, official campaign partners, media partners and the Enterprise Europe Network the campaign has six main objectives:

- To raise awareness of the importance of preventing MSDs by providing facts and figures on exposure to MSDs and their impact on individuals, businesses and society;
- To promote risk assessment and the proactive management of MSDs by providing access to relevant tools, guidance, and audio-visual and other support materials;
- To show that MSDs are an issue for everyone but can be successfully tackled;
- To improve knowledge of new and emerging MSD risk factors;
- To promote the importance of supporting workers with chronic MSDs to be reintegrated into and to remain in the workplace, and demonstrate how this can be achieved;
- To encourage effective collaboration by bringing different stakeholders together and facilitating the exchange of information and good practice.

Campaign highlights include the European Weeks for Safety and Health at Work (October 2020, 2021 and 2022), a Good Practice Exchange event in March 2022, and the Good Practice Awards Ceremony and Healthy Workplaces Summit in November 2022.

For further information visit <https://healthy-workplaces.eu/en>