

Minimizing Workplace Stress, Injuries and Violence in Canada: Towards a New Standard for Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

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OVERVIEW: The purpose of this paper is to provide new perspectives on OHS, by:

1. examining workplace stress and its implications for OHS,² workplace mental health issues and costs;
2. looking at how the *Voluntary Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace*³ has been 'taking hold' and how it can be applied to strengthen OHS in Canada's workplaces; and
3. showing how reducing workplace stress through better HR practices can reduce OHS injuries, accidents & violence, and related costs, including absenteeism, turnover and litigation.

In our conclusions, we show that a psychologically healthy workplace is central to OHS and the General Duty Provisions which are present in some form in all OHS legislation, and which require employers to ensure that workplaces are safe and healthy for all employees.

Impacts & Costs in 2014: *Workplace stress, bullying, harassment, and violence are increasingly centre stage issues for Canadians. Awareness of the staggering economic cost of workplace stress (and related issues in mental illness), to the public and industry (lost productivity), grows steadily. These costs to the Canadian economy are well over \$51 billion⁴ annually. The workplace is a central part of these costs, according to Statistics Canada.⁵*

Research also points to stress as a contributing factor in actual workplace accidents, injuries, and violence, making it a major factor in OHS. Noting that Canada ranked 4th highest in the most recent international study of work-place violence,⁶ we argue that *reducing stress and creating psychologically healthy workplaces also reduces accident and injury levels as well as violence. This concern affects employers, managers, workers, unions, and society generally.*

A dramatic illustration was seen in April 2014, when a terminated employee fatally shot two co-workers and wounded two others at Nanaimo's Western Forest Products. These events followed termination of his employment and an ongoing and stressful dispute over method of termination, severance pay and subsequent recall upon the plant's re-opening. Such tragedies can result when workplaces fail to sensitively manage stress and change (including layoffs). They also point to the need for more sensitive HR practices. Such cases become painfully real topics for everyone.

"Mental illness costs the Canadian economy \$51 billion a year. That is why our government is committed to .. promoting increased uptake across Canada of the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the workplace."

Dr. Kellie Leitch, Minister of Labour Canada

"Bell has embraced the Standard as part of our commitment to best practices in workplace mental health, and look forward to sharing our own experiences and results with workplace mental health to help other companies."

George Cope, President, Bell Canada

"The reality of a changing economy and the workplace instability it creates faces all of us. There is no question that in these uncertain times, workplace mental health is severely tested and often affected."

Ken Georgetti, Past President, Canadian Labour Congress

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² Stress is defined as by the World Health Organization as 'the reaction people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope'. Components of stress include harassment, overtime and fatigue. Stress and anger can also result from poor management policies, e.g. unfairly disputed claims for severance.

³ The Standard was developed by the Canadian Commission on Mental Health, the Canadian Standards Association & Bureau de normalisation du Québec.

⁴ Dewa et al (2008). A New Population-Based Measure of the Burden of Mental Illness in Canada.

⁵ Statistics Canada's most recent research estimated that 60% of highly stressed workers identified work as their main source of stress.

⁶ Derrick Hynes (2014). *Preventing Workplace Violence: Towards an Aggression-Free Workplace*, Conference Board of Canada, 2001, and Workplace Calm, *Workplace Violence: a New or Old Problem*.

Cost of Workplace Stress: In addition to the human costs and suffering when workers die, are injured or become ill, the financial costs to individuals, employers and society are great. At the start of this paper, we noted a \$51 billion price tag on mental illness, a great part of which is for employee disability leave or time off due to stress. Stress is also a major factor in many workplace injuries and losses covered by workers' compensation or other insurance (Dembe et al. 2005 shows evidence of impacts of stress in all sectors), which costs Canadians another \$12 billion annually (Workers' Compensation and private insurance combined). A related issue is "*presenteeism*" -- where workers attend work, but are not fully productive because of stress or depression. Additionally, business, government and non-governmental organizations suffer lost productivity which is substantial, although detailed costs are not estimated. Managing and, where possible, reducing stress must therefore be a priority for our efforts to ensure good quality workplaces and productivity -- good HR and OHS practices are both key to this.

Policies & Practices to Reduce OHS Losses: For over 100 years, governments, prudent employers, unions and associations have developed OHS initiatives to reduce such losses. This is reflected in a highly evolved structure of laws, regulations & inspections, training programs (e.g. OHS awareness, training on specific hazards), and workplace best practices. This is also seen in the supportive work of governments, dozens of industry safety associations and hundreds of unions. Yet generally, despite these efforts *OHS losses including deaths and costs from accidents and illnesses have remained relatively constant?*⁷ *Why should this be so?*

As regards workplace stress, government efforts are seen in anti-bullying and anti-harassment legislation or regulations which have been implemented in jurisdictions across Canada, partly in response to tragedies, such as the OC Transpo massacre of 1999.⁸ Anti-harassment and bullying legislation intends a top-down effort to encourage employers to combat bullying and violence. Yet workplace bullying and harassment continue. Similarly, incidents such as that in Nanaimo show the continuing impact of poor HR & communications in many workplaces. Why should this be so?

A premise of this paper is that overall OHS losses have continued relatively unchanged over the past decades, because high level laws, policies and statements of principle have not affected the way in which we organize work (workplace culture). As a result, HR and other practices have not been designed to fully impact on workers, and the psychological health of workplaces. **Laws are essential. But more is needed than just laws.** Rather, we need a change in the culture of our workplaces, and in management and human resources style. *We argue that these changes can be aided by aligning psychological OHS within the core of broader OHS policy. This would affirm anti-stress goals in OHS, in the general duty provisions for employers' OHS responsibilities.⁹ As well, this could lock in its effectiveness through training and monitoring, such as that suggested by the Voluntary Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace introduced in 2012. To develop this line of thought, we will first examine recent efforts to move in this direction.*

The Standard: In May 2013, we described the *Standard* as providing: "a systematic approach to develop and sustain psychologically healthy and safe workplaces, including the identification of psychological hazards such as *stress*; the assessment and control of the risks associated with hazards that cannot be eliminated; the implementation of practices that support and promote psychological [OHS]; the growth of a culture that promotes psychological [OHS]; and the implementation of measurement and review systems to ensure effectiveness and sustainability."¹⁰

It is timely then, to examine progress towards safer and psychologically healthier workplaces, particularly through recent efforts by governments, organizations such as the Canadian Commission on Mental Health, Bell Canada and others.¹¹ We also consider what more should be done to create safer workplaces.

⁷ In the past 20 years, the annual number of Canadian workplace deaths has increased from 756 to 977, a rate somewhat similar to the growth in the workforce. For example, see Gavigan and Harvey, *Canadian Government Executive*, June 2014, for a discussion of a death at the Cliff Heating Plant explosion, which occurred on Parliament Hill in 2009, for which Public Works and Government Services Canada pled guilty to negligence.

⁸ Four OC Transpo workers were shot and were killed in this harassment-related shooting -- the shooter committed suicide.

⁹ See: Ontario's outline of the General Duty Clause, *Part III: Duties of Employers and Other Persons | A Guide to the Occupational Health and Safety Act* | Ontario Ministry of Labour, http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/pubs/ohsa/ohsag_part3.php

¹⁰ See; Gavigan and Harvey, *Canadian Government Executive*, May 2013.

¹¹ January 2014 marked the first anniversary of the release of Canada's Voluntary Standards on Psychological OHS in the workplace. Jan. 28 marked Bell Canada's 2nd *Let's Talk Day*, which engaged hundreds of thousands of Canadians in the mental health conversation.

Has the stage been set for greater change? To answer this question, we conducted a Canada-wide environmental scan to see how the new *Standard* is taking hold. Building on our research over the past year, we drew from discussions with organizations (business and unions in all regions and industries, government at all levels, and academics and mental health practitioners such as the Canadian Mental Health Association). We also examined *best practices* which organizations have used to improve the 'psychological health' of their workplaces and examined related Canadian and international research.

For our environmental scan, we spoke to over 100 of Canada's senior managers and HR & OHS professionals. These persons were chosen based on a literature review, and referrals from key informants, cascaded from leaders in government, health and safety and mental health agencies. *We concluded from these discussions that the Standard is increasingly recognized as a point of reference for efforts to create psychologically healthy workplaces in Canada. Many organizations have adopted the Standard, and many others have created similar programs.*

Our conclusion regarding the impact of the *Standard* was reaffirmed by extremely high demands for information as seen in thousands of organizations downloading the *Standard*, increasing demand for workplace mental health training programs, and a significant increase in media attention to the topic of psychologically healthy workplaces – both on-line and in print. This attention has been seen in all sectors, in OHS and HR publications and industry sector magazines. Even so, more fundamental changes in OHS law and its interpretation and workplace practice have been slow to follow, raising the question – “what else can we do”?

Can we *eliminate* stress? Stress is a part of everyday life and work, and cannot be completely eliminated. Indeed, some jobs have very high levels of stress, danger and trauma (e.g. policing, firefighting and health care). In such cases, stress is endemic and the key to organizational success is for managers (and others) to recognize workplace-related stress and strive to minimize it. *How can this be done?*

We see three strategies for change: (1) re-inventing the workplace; (2) waiting for changes from the courts and administrative tribunals; and (3) bringing about changes in OHS laws & regulations – in particular, by recognizing the *General Duty Provisions* as including psychological health as an employers' mandated responsibility.

Strategy 1: Re-inventing Workplaces. *Where jobs are more stressful, management needs to respond appropriately, with higher levels of communications, maximum support for employees and efforts to reduce stress.* In more typical workplaces, stress can be related to simpler factors such as organizational changes and staff reductions which are poorly planned and/or managed. Unreasonable workloads, *overtime* (a key stress factor), poor organization of work, and poor support of workers can also be contributing factors. Effective managers can reduce such "typical" workplace stress by minimizing some of the stress factors noted immediately above. Workers and unions can also be key participants.¹² Two distinct approaches can allow workplaces to reduce stress, OHS injuries and costs.

A first approach is to better *deal* with employees' own mental health problems. Managers do this *mainly by responding to mental health issues employees bring to work (family issues etc.).* We can better respond to these employee needs by creating a supportive environment and making better use of wellness and employee assistance programs (EAPs). Managers don't need to become 'psychotherapists' but they *do* need to be more aware of workplace behaviour, communicate openly and effectively with employees, use all of their resources, and in this way better aid those at risk. *Unions and workers can also aid such important changes.*

A second approach is to *mitigate* stress created by the workplace itself. Managers can do this by keeping workloads reasonable, controlling overtime and related stress, applying teamwork to deal with "work overload crises," maximizing respect for all employees, allowing for flexibility, clarifying roles, maximizing employees' sense of value and security, and (when necessary) implementing terminations in a fair and sensitive manner (an important factor in reducing workplace violence). This is important, as *a growing body of research points to workplace stress and associated management and HR practices as a direct factors in accidents (such as the Lac Mégantic tragedy), injuries and also violence such as that seen in the recent Nanaimo shootings.*

¹² For example, many Ontario health agencies have brought about change in psychological health, reducing stress through understanding of their workplace obtained through use of the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario's *Mental Injuries Toolkit*. Hundreds of other corporations, governments and NGOs have made similar advances using the Great West Life Survey: *Guarding Minds at Work (GM@W)*.

Best Practices to create healthier workplaces: *In our cross-Canada research, we identified 7 best practices which can aid the approaches noted above, which all workplace parties can pursue to build psychologically healthy workplaces:*

- 1. It is essential to enshrine senior officials' support for a psychologically healthy workplace.** Many we spoke to suggested that a critical starting point to create healthier workplaces is obtaining the support of an organization's leadership (often the CEO or equivalent). Ideally, this should be in a written memorandum from CEOs to managers and staff, affirming the goal of a healthy workplace, with an implementation plan. Support from senior executives and management bodies (boards of directors, councils) was found to be key to the success of many agencies' programs we examined that supported better psychological OHS.
- 2. Assess workplace needs.** This usually requires a *workplace survey* to assess risks (such as stress from work overload, overtime, or related factors). Our interviews noted many cases where a survey of employees identified sources of stress and thus aided workplace change (using tools such as the *Mental Injuries Toolkit*, or Great West Life's *Guarding Minds at Work Survey*).
- 3. Build the business case for a psychologically healthy workplace.** This can be aided by showing the costs of sick leave, disability costs and (estimated) costs of presenteeism to management. Our research revealed a number of instances where junior managers "carried" the business case to senior management, bringing about significant changes even in very large organizations.
- 4. Train front-line supervisors and employees.** With training on mental health, managers and supervisors are in a better position to assess employee performance issues, patterns of absence from work and more easily discuss workplace factors which may relate to stress, mental health and job performance. Managers and supervisors will then be better able to refer employees to EAP, counselling, etc. There are many practical courses (and videos) available. For example, the '*Mental Health Works*' training program of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) has been used to generate an atmosphere where employees will "open up" and discuss stress and mental health issues. As one manager reported to us: "Working with CMHA enabled [us] to provide cost-effective and easily accessible training to all supervisors and employees. Training, including videos, could be handled in staff meetings and succeeded in influencing employee behaviour for the better. Training all staff led to a dramatic change in ...support for psychological OHS."
- 5. Create a "seamless" effort.** Workplaces should include EVERYONE in these efforts -- HR professionals, Wellness Services, EAPs, bargaining units, and Joint Health and Safety Committees (JHSCs) -- to ensure use of the best "tools" and to aid broad buy-in. Many managers we spoke to -- in all sectors -- referred to the importance of aligning efforts to improve the psychological health of their workplaces with existing services such as EAP and wellness services. This is particularly important in view of tight budgets and the need to work within existing resources. A key challenge is to broaden the scope of EAP/wellness services from a focus on needs of individual employees, to organizational issues -- workload, overtime, and more effective management.
- 6. Build the goal of better psychological OHS into accountability.** Performance Management Agreements for managers and evaluations of all employees should reward achievement of psychological OHS goals. These should indicate what is expected of managers as regards stress reduction and how they will be rewarded for success. Many managers that we interviewed talked about the importance of aligning company values and goals with psycho-social goals and integrating those into performance/management agreements.¹³
- 7. Review and enhance the policy environment.** Supervisors, workers and unions should ask senior managers to clarify expectations and duties with respect to psychological OHS; ask how sensitivity to stress can be made integral to the workplace culture, and how success of related OHS plans can be monitored.

¹³ This topic -- incentives for good management performance in OHS generally -- is widely researched by US OSHA, and the European Agency for Health and Safety (see our tools/resource web page noted at the end of this article).

Strategy 2: Wait for Changes from the Courts & Tribunals: Many believe that there exists, within existing laws, great potential for legal liability, and thus change through the courts. Martin Shain – one of Canada's leading experts on these matters -- describes the growing momentum of requirements for psychological OHS as '*the Perfect Legal Storm*':

"The duty to provide and maintain a psychologically safe workplace is developing in different ways across Canadian jurisdictions and within various legislative and regulatory bodies, but a common thread is the increasing insistence of judges, arbitrators and commissioners upon more civil and respectful behaviour in the workplace and avoidance of conduct that a reasonable person should foresee as leading to mental injury. In addition to restricting management rights, adjudicators are also becoming more proactive in detailing how organizations must operate in order to meet this goal." (*The Shain Reports on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace – A Summary*.)

The *General Duty Provisions found in OHS legislation* require that employers ensure that the health and safety of every person employed by the employer is applied with physical OHS in mind. Many others argue that this should include psychological OHS (a point of view supported by the distinguished adjudicator, Owen Shime). Quebec, for example, has begun to use the General Duty Provisions to address psycho-social hazards. In addition, recent Canada-wide regulations aimed at the prevention of occupational violence and related factors such as bullying have opened doors for dealing with broader impacts on psychological OHS of employees. These behaviours can have a direct negative impact on psychological health and can exacerbate the ill-health of employees who already feel stress due to job insecurity or personal circumstances (e.g. poor family relationships). Dealing effectively with such factors can help to avoid tragedies such as that in Nanaimo, B.C.

A similar evolution appears to be taking place with respect to workers Compensation. Compensation awards are increasingly being upheld by the courts for mental injuries resulting from chronic stress. As well, the 'General Duty to Accommodate' provisions in Human Rights legislation includes the requirement to accommodate employees suffering from mental disorders.¹⁴ This was seen in the recent Ontario WSIB Tribunal decision (WSIAB 2157/09) which affirmed treatment of stress as a charter right. Thus, the obligation to deal with stress appears to be *coming fast* at employers. As well, a more direct rationale is evident when we look at the role of stress in increasing OHS losses generally, as shown below.

Strategy 3: Recognize Psychological OHS in the General Duty Provisions.

We began this research focused on reducing OHS costs resulting from workplace stress itself – e.g. disability compensation or leave for stress. **However, a growing body of research points to the reduction of stress as a way of reducing OHS losses generally -- reducing accidents and injuries (in vehicles or the warehouse, on the factory floor) and reducing violence.** Substantial research has shown this to be true in transit, trucking, mining, manufacturing, construction, warehousing, energy, agriculture, health, sales and other sectors where long hours and stress are a key part of the equation for accidents. Research conducted by Dembe et al. on a very large U.S. sample of workers in all industries demonstrates the striking impact of stress on injuries across all industries and sectors.¹⁵ Indeed, **stress is often seen as the "tipping point" or "trigger" for accidents and injuries.**

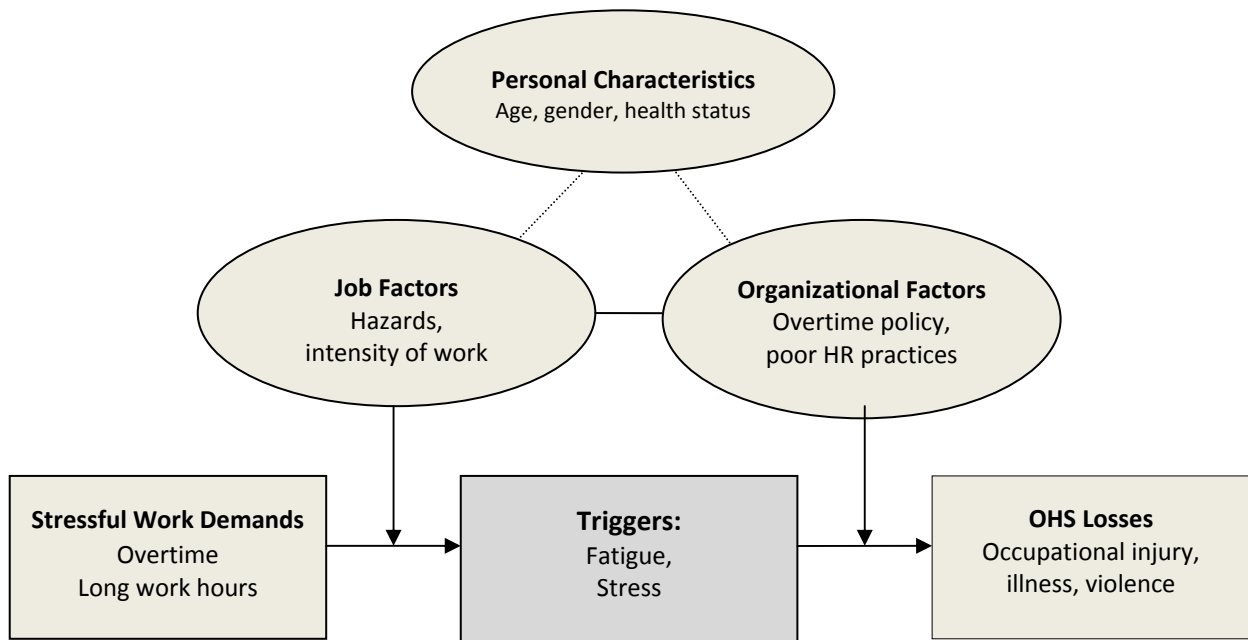
¹⁴ See: Ann Somerville, *Mental Stress: Canadian Workers' Compensation Legislation*, Canadian Bar Association January 2014. Also see: "Stressed-out BC Workers to get expanded benefits" (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/>).

¹⁵ For a key example, see: Dembe, A.E et al. "The Impact of Overtime and Long Work Hours on Occupational Injuries and illnesses", *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 2005 62: 588-597. Also see specific industry studies: Akinori Nakata et al., "The Impact of psychosocial job stress on non-fatal occupational injuries in small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises", *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, August 2006; J. Duchon & T. Smith, *Extended workdays in mining and other industries: a review of the literature*. Minneapolis: United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Mines, Twin Cities Research Center, 1994; Eijkelhof, B.H.W et al., "The effects of workplace stressors on muscle activity in the neck-shoulder and forearm muscles during computer work", *European Journal of Applied Physiology* (2013); Frederic Gerr et al., "A prospective study of musculoskeletal outcomes among manufacturing workers II; Effects of psychosocial stress and work organization factors," *Human Factors*, February, 2014; Greiner, B. A. et al., "Objective Stress Factors Accidents and Absenteeism in Transit Operators," *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* (1998); Iwasaki K, Sasaki T, Oka T, et al., "Effect of working hours on biological functions related to cardiovascular system among salesmen in a machinery manufacturing company" *Ind Health*, 1998;36: B.D. Kirkcaldy et al., "Working hours, job stress, work satisfaction and accident rates among medical practitioners, consultants and allied personnel," *International Journal of Stress Management*, 1997; McCartt A, Rohrbaugh J, Hammer M, et al. "Factors associated with falling asleep at the wheel among long-distance truck drivers." *Accident Anals Prevention*, 2000; S.P. Proctor, et al. The effect of overtime work on cognitive function in automotive workers, *Scandinavian Journal of Work & Environmental Health*, 1996; S. Salminen et al., "Stress factors predicting injuries of hospital personnel," *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, July 2003; and A. Spurgeon "Working time: its impact on safety and health. International Labour Organization, <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/condtrav/publ/wtwo-as-03.htm>2003.

Stress and Trigger Factors: As noted above, extensive research clearly indicates that a workplace culture that embraces a more sensitive HR program and reduces stress (e.g. by limiting excessive overtime and fatigue) results in fewer injuries. This is because the culture allows workers and managers to better focus their minds on OHS standards, procedures and best practices. In such workplaces, where a strong safety culture exists and stress can be reduced, "triggers" for injuries will be fewer & OHS will be improved.

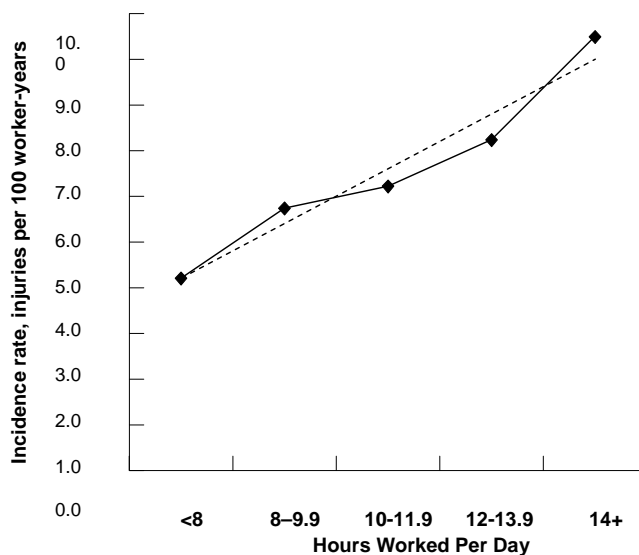
But even a "good" workplace can experience accidents and injuries, if random or systematic triggers are in place. As shown below in Figure 1, adapted from Dembe (2009), stress and fatigue occupy a unique position in the sequence of factors which trigger accidents, injuries and violence. Such triggers can be manifest in any workplace, but are more likely to be present in workplaces which are not psychologically healthy.

**Figure 1:
Stress & Fatigue as Triggers for OHS Losses**



Overtime as a Key Stress Factor:

Dembe's large scale U.S. study (2005) shows, at the right, that overtime, a key predictor of stress, (measured in hours worked per day), is strongly related to incidence of injuries. The figure shows the *injury rate per 100 worker years more than doubling as the average work day moves from less than 8 to over 14 hours per day* (data from the U.S National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, representing records for over 89,000 person years of working time). (Dembe, 2005)



Fatigue and Catastrophic Accidents: Fatigue has been shown to be a critical factor in accidents in transportation, particularly in trucking and rail as well as in major environmental accidents.¹⁶ Some have suggested that the tragic train derailment in Lac Mégantic, Quebec, on July 6, 2013 is an illustration of this. This view is based on great responsibility which fell on one worker during a night shift. This followed a "parking of the train" overnight, on a grade, while the lone engineer went to a hotel to rest for the night, leaving the train unattended (which practice was required by company policy). The runaway train derailment resulted in the deaths of 47 individuals and the destruction of much of downtown Lac Mégantic. In May 2014, the engineer and two of the railways' managers were charged with criminal negligence. ***This tragedy might have been predicted.*** The union representing the engineer (United Steelworkers) and many others, had previously argued that this "parking" procedure required two operators—to check the technical details of locking numerous train brakes. With one engineer working alone, short-staffing and the fatigue hypothesis remain prominent in the ongoing Lac Mégantic investigations.¹⁷

Stress & Workplace Violence: Illustrations such as the *OC Transpo* massacre of 1999¹⁸ show the role which stress plays in precipitating workplace violence. Similarly, the recent Nanaimo tragedy and other examples show the added impact of poor HR and confrontational management practices. Because of these types of tragedies, an extensive practice literature has emerged on identifying warning signals of violence, and smooth handling of sensitive situations such as termination of employees.¹⁹ All of these steps call for a sensitive HR regime, and taking time to deal with employee needs in a communicative and caring way – in a psychologically healthy workplace. Reducing stress will reduce violence, but equally important is the creation of a sensitive HR function to aid a healthy workplace culture.

Conclusion: Our review shows stress as a key factor in workplace OHS losses of all types. We also show some moves towards creating psychologically healthier workplaces as a result of the introduction of *the Standard*. *As well, a number of best practices have been identified and a link has been shown as to how psychologically healthier workplaces improve OHS generally.*²⁰

Increasing Change: The potential impacts of the *Standard* in aiding these changes is seen in tens of thousands of downloads of the *Standard* and related resources, increasing participation in Webinars offered by the Mental Health Commission, and information-sharing by professional associations. Also important are initial *actions by governments* and others to respond to the *Standard* within workplaces. For example, the Ontario Ministry of Government Services has recently launched an initiative to provide training on mental health issues for managers across all Ontario Government Ministries. Québec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, BC and Yukon have also given high attention to psychologically healthy workplaces. *Private sector leadership* in this area has also been striking, with responses – from small employers such as The Real Estate Board of Greater Vancouver, to larger ones such as Bell Canada and Via Rail. *Major unions* such as Unifor have also incorporated principles of the *Standard* into OHS initiatives.

¹⁶ An illustration recently in the news involved a serious accident in which the television personality Tracy Morgan was critically injured and one other person killed in a collision, when a truck whose driver reportedly had not slept in 24 hours, collided with an airport limousine. More generally, research on fatigue has identified sleep deprivation–fatigue as a factor in major environmental accidents such as Exxon Valdez, Three Mile Island and Chernobyl. See: Candice Griffith and Sankaran Mahadevan, "Inclusion of fatigue effects in human reliability analysis, *Reliability Engineering & System Safety*," Volume 96, Issue 11, November 2011, pp. 1437-1447.

¹⁷ Validation of the need for a two-person crew was affirmed by an emergency order from the US Federal Railroad Administration on Aug. 2, 2013. For a discussion, see: Bruce Campbell, *The Lac Mégantic Disaster, Where Does the Buck Stop?* Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Oct. 2013. Campbell notes a link to overwork and fatigue, stating: "Railway unions in both Canada and the U.S. have long maintained that, because of the complexity of the operation, at least two persons are needed. They argue that fatigue is a huge problem for engineers and at least two are required to check each other's work. On a heavily loaded train on a steep grade, setting enough handbrakes to prevent the train from moving is an arduous task for one person." Also see: Tristin Hopper "'Complex' latticework of errors that caused Lac Mégantic Tragedy, *National Post*, July 12, 2013; Simon Vodrey, "Tragedy Touches Lac Mégantic", *Ottawa Life*, July 16, 2013.

¹⁸ This tragedy was associated with 5 deaths, and was precipitated by bullying, ongoing conflict, and some management failures. For a discussion, see: Brenda Branswell, "Ottawa Massacre," *Maclean's*, April 28, 2003.

¹⁹ See, for example: Julian Barling et al., "Predicting Workplace Aggression and Violence", *Annual Review of Psychology* (January 2009). Barling et al. point out many myths about violence, including when layoffs may and may not be a factor. Also see: Don Philpott, and Don Grimme, *The Workplace Violence Prevention Handbook* (2002) for details on HR and management strategies.

²⁰ Other impacts of a psychologically healthy workplace are, as indicated by a recent SPR international scan of researchers, thought to include higher use of and greater success of return-to-work programs.

Such indicators are positive, showing a growing effort to create more psychologically healthy workplaces and more responsive HR practices. Even so, these voluntary actions are extremely preliminary: a need remains for governments to further these efforts by clarifying the duty of employers as regards the importance of psychological OHS, and ensuring its effective and sustained implementation.²¹

To avoid merely *responding* to OHS losses and minimizing costs of absenteeism etc., now is the time for employers and their HR and OHS professionals and unions to take positive steps to ensure psychologically healthy workplaces. By taking action now, employers and others can “get in front” of the issue, laying the groundwork for comprehensive change.

To aid this, Ministries responsible for OHS in all jurisdictions should further integrate psychological OHS into OHS laws and regulations by clearly including psychological OHS in the General Duty Provisions for employers (in particular, by including chronic stress in the definition of “injury”), along with requirements for implementation and follow-thru.²²

To support the efforts of managers, HR Professionals and unions, governments should ensure that the existing ‘ground rules’ – those dealing with workplace violence and harassment – are clearly understood. As well, moving sensitive HR programs into closer collaboration with all health and safety players, including unions and JHSCs, will improve overall organizational performance. This will be important in all business sectors, including social services and health. *Benefits will be seen in the reduction of OHS losses of all types, and an increase in productivity, since reduction of stress in workplaces is proven to aid the profit performance of businesses and the efficiency of other types of organizations.*

There are many good reasons for government, business and labour to promote psychologically healthy workplaces. In addition to reducing human and financial losses because of psychologically unhealthy work environments, improved psychological OHS will offer economic benefits to society. Decades of research have shown that reducing stress in workplaces reduces OHS losses and produces higher workforce satisfaction and productivity and (in the private sector) improved profits.²³

First steps to move in this direction should include an assessment of awareness of psychological health issues in workplaces, among managers, HR and OHS professionals, JHSCs and others, and an assessment of the availability of tools and resources which allow workplaces to respond to these needs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: See: <http://www.spr.ca/OHS/OHS-tools-resources.pdf> , for useful resources and tools, including: the business case for psychologically healthy workplaces; success stories and return-on-investment; incentives for managers' OHS performance, and survey methods to assess stress in the workplace (for example, from the OHCOW *Mental Injuries Toolbox*, or the *GM@W Survey*, or the Government of Canada *TBS Employee Survey*). Some of these resources include extensive training programs. *For more information on this paper or to comment, please e-mail ted.harvey@spr.ca*

Acknowledgements: We would like to thank the following persons who provided background research or input on previous versions of this paper: Dr. Cam Mustard, Institute of Work and Health; Ms. Sapna Mahajan, Canadian Commission on Mental Health; Dr. Katherine Lippel, Canada Research Chair on Occupational Health and Safety, University of Ottawa, Faculty of Law; Dr. Brent Rutherford (York University); Ms. Terri Aversa (OPSEU); Ms. Marianne Levitsky, Ms. Marian Ficycz, The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, and many others in business, unions and academia. Responsibility for all conclusions rests with SPR Associates.

²¹ Sustainability requires standards, procedures, training and monitoring, as per the *Standard*.

²² As Shain notes in *Stress at Work, Mental Injury and the Law in Canada* (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2009), inclusion of mental health in the employer's obligations under General Duty Provisions has previously been set by administrative tribunals in Ontario. See: *TTC and Amalgamated Transit Union [2005] 132 LAC 4th 225, a decision by the distinguished adjudicator Owen Shime*.

²³ See: Maureen Dollard and Daniel Naser, "Worker Health is Good for the Economy: Union density and psychosocial safety climate as determinants of country differences in worker health and productivity in 31 European Countries," *Social Science and Medicine*, 2013. Related positive impacts are seen in psychologically healthy workplaces aiding success of return-to-work programs for injured workers.