



## ACTIVISTS FRONT AND CENTRE AT CONVENTION FORUM

CUPE health and safety activists engaged in a rousing dialogue of issues and strategies for change following opening remarks by guest Dr. Linda Murray at the health and safety forum during national convention. A former CUPE member from Winnipeg's Occupational Health and Safety Clinic, Murray kick-started the October 4, 2005 evening, urging members to seek answers to problems by sharing their combined knowledge and experiences. Earlier Murray, who now works with health agencies in Chicago, addressed the entire convention floor as keynote speaker. It was a day during which her words inspired reflection, discussion and actions in many CUPE circles.

"The experts about health and safety in the workplace are the workers," Murray told a crowd of activists in the huge forum hall. She reminded everyone that workers know their jobs better than anyone and know what causes health and safety problems. But she also cautioned CUPE members that while they are the experts, health and safety issues have to be



*Dr. Linda Murray: workers are the experts*

"put in plain English that people can understand."

Knowledge and training are the first two tools CUPE members need to solve health and safety problems, Murray said. Also key is a union health and safety committee that meets separately from the joint health and safety committee and has its own agenda.

After speaking for about 20 minutes, Murray urged CUPE members to stand up and talk about the problems they face day-to-day and the solutions they've come up with. For the next hour and a half, the assembled activists queued at the mikes to share their stories.

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The issues that members put front and centre were:

- Workload and overwork
- Under-staffing
- Workplace violence
- Workplace toxins and hazardous substances
- Material safety data sheets, which are too complicated
- Asbestos exposure
- Moulds
- Harassment
- Biohazards in libraries

Members from health care, child care, airline, municipal and library workplaces rose to speak. Some were frustrated, others the forum energized. Many shared their routes for successfully solving health and safety problems.

One member talked about using the legislation to make employers accountable to fully ensure workers' health and safety.

Another talked about breaking down MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheets) into clear language. The member had taken a CUPE workshop on workplace toxins that deciphered MSDS. As a result, the activist was able to get hazardous cleaning products removed from schools on Vancouver Island. This member's success supported Murray's point that workers have the power and tools to make a difference once they're informed, knowledgeable and ready to act.

When the evening closed, a couple hundred CUPE health and safety activists left the forum determined to take action and make changes.



## STRICTER ENFORCEMENT AND AIRLINE STAFFING RESOLUTIONS PASSED

Delegates passed two health and safety resolutions at CUPE's National Convention in Winnipeg in October, 2005. Resolution 277 dealt with stricter enforcement of existing health and safety laws to eliminate hazards and reduce workplace injuries, illnesses and deaths. National health and safety award winner Donald Postar spoke to the resolution: "It's shameful! When a dog bites someone, they put the dog down. When a manager or a company kills someone, they get a \$150,000 fine. Why aren't we insuring the maximum penalty for these people?"

Resolution 8 centred on safe staffing levels for airline workers to ensure safe conditions for passengers. The resolution called for CUPE National to lobby the federal government and Transport Canada to maintain the level of one flight attendant per 40 passengers. Pamela Sachs, chair of CUPE's Airline Division, cited adequate flight attendant staffing levels as a key reason why passengers were safely evacuated from an Air France jet that ran off the runway in Toronto in August, 2005. Sachs said, "Contrary to what airlines say, we're not waitresses or waiters in the sky. We're trained safety professionals."

# SCHOOL CUSTODIAN WINS AWARD

Donald M. Postar from CUPE 5555 is the recipient of the 2005 Health and Safety Award. CUPE National President Paul Moist presented the award to Brother Postar at the national convention in Winnipeg in October, 2005.

Postar works as a school custodian in Ontario's Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board. He was the unanimous choice of National Health and Safety Committee members involved in the selection process. His nomination stood out because of his long-time activism best shown by his courage and resolve to take on the employer and win.

"Donald is an activist whose efforts helped other CUPE members," said sister Pearl Blommaert, co-chair of the National Health and Safety Committee. "He has made direct and measurable health and safety interventions in his workplace, which were successful."

Postar's activism includes:

- Lobbying his employer to prevent the purchase and use of propane burnishers in schools.
- Fighting to have Red Gel Vandal Remover taken out of schools in his district because the product contains carcinogens.
- Advocating through his joint health and safety committee to have the cleaner Powerhouse eliminated from area schools. Co-workers had suffered allergic reactions to the product.
- Helping to develop proper work-site health and safety inspection methods by setting up a training program for CUPE staff, teachers and administrators.



*Donald Postar, CUPE 5555, unanimous choice for the 2005 Health and Safety Award*

- Helping create a workplace policy and employee handbook on violence in special education.

Brother Postar has been a member of his workplace joint health and safety committee since 1993. He has called employers to task countless times for their failure to comply with health and safety regulations. Many Ontario Ministry of Labour orders were issued as a result. He has helped other CUPE locals set up joint health and safety committees and write terms of reference for those committees.

He has also taken every opportunity to educate himself on health and safety matters. He's taken CUPE, Ontario Federation of Labour and Ontario Workers' Health and Safety Centre courses on everything from workplace stress, to asbestos hazards, to advanced health and safety law. Over the years, Postar has combined knowledge gained at educationals with his own on-the-job experience to become a tenacious fighter on behalf of CUPE sisters and brothers.

Fittingly, when National Health and Safety Director Anthony Pizzino telephoned to notify him that he'd won the award, Brother Postar was at the Toronto Occupational Health Clinic for Ontario Workers late on a Friday afternoon. He was at the clinic doing what he always does, working to improve health and safety conditions for other CUPE members. The award is well earned. Congratulations Brother Postar!

## NEW FROM CUPE'S NATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY BRANCH

The branch has just published its *Report on CUPE's 9<sup>th</sup> National Health and Safety Conference*. The conference theme was Step Up! Take Action! The goal of the conference was to equip CUPE members with tools to deal with and resolve health and safety hazards.

The report highlights the key achievements of the conference. It describes the outcomes of the four workshop topics: workplace toxins, indoor air quality hazards, ergonomics and joint health and safety committees. The key points of the four guest speakers—Linda Murray, Katherine Lippel, Robert Storey and Karen Messing—are outlined.

The report was sent out in a general mailing to all CUPE locals in November, 2005. Additional copies are available at no cost by contacting the National Health and Safety Branch.

# RSI DAY

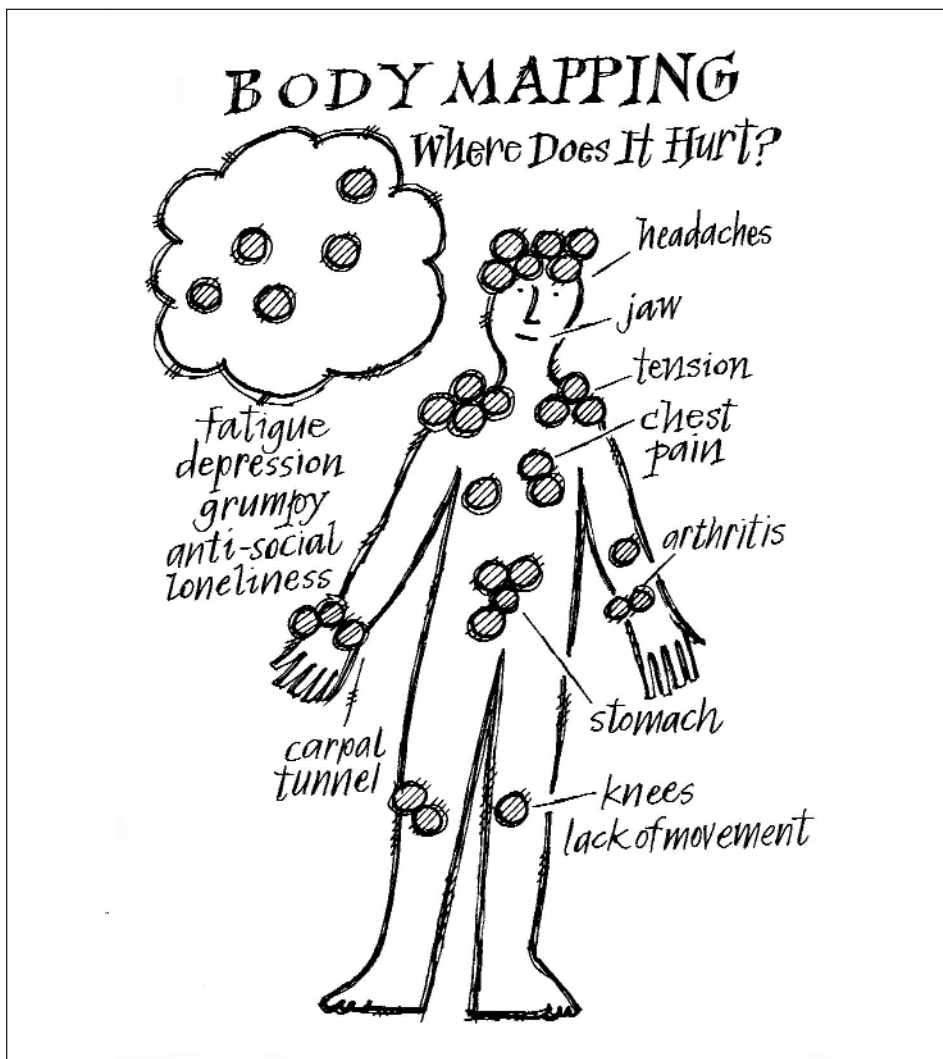
Tuesday February 28, 2006 is International Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI) Awareness Day. RSIs are the most common type of workplace injury in Canada. They include a variety of disorders that affect muscles, tendons, nerves and joints. Injuries to the wrists, fingers, forearms, hands, elbows, shoulders and the neck are the most recurrent.

RSI Day is an opportunity to promote injury prevention and raise awareness about the preva-

lence of RSIs and their harmful effects. RSIs affect workers forced to do monotonous, repetitive jobs, who work too long or too fast and with too few breaks. Often, workers are forced to work in awkward positions or spend too long standing. Bad work organization (e.g., forced and unnecessary overtime, staff cutbacks and layoffs, poorly maintained equipment) contributes to RSIs. Workplace stress and lack of control over work also have a hand in RSIs.

The first RSI Awareness Day was February 29, 2000. That day was selected because it was the only non-repetitive day of the year. The day is recognized on the 28th in non-leap years.

For more information on RSIs, including detailed prevention strategies, please contact the National Health and Safety Branch to request a copy of the RSI fact sheet and look for the new Ergonomics guideline early in 2006.



*Body mapping is a useful technique for identifying repetitive strain injuries*

## COMING SOON!

CUPE's National Health and Safety Branch will soon publish new fact sheets on Moulds, Critical Incident Stress and Accident and Occupational Disease Investigations. A new health and safety guideline on Ergonomics will likewise be published. Look for these documents early in 2006.

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Health and Safety Branch  
21 Florence Street, Ottawa, Ontario  
K2P 0W6  
phone: (613) 237-1590  
fax: (613) 233-3438  
e-mail: [health\\_safety@cupe.ca](mailto:health_safety@cupe.ca)