



# Lightening the load

By Susan Main

Ergonomic solutions reduce risk of injury at Surrey School District's Learning Resources Services.

*The Surrey School District introduced adjustable roller conveyors to reduce the risk of musculoskeletal injuries caused by heavy lifting at its Learning Resources Services. Picture here from left to right: Hakima Lamari, Gloria Morton, and Cathy Kozlowski.*

Supplying text and library books for B.C.'s largest school district is a heavy workload. Each day, staff at Surrey School District's Learning Resources Services load and unload thousands of books into boxes that, when full, weigh on average 18 kg (40 lbs.). Sixteen people order, receive, sort, process, and ship books to the District's

128 schools – and the more they lift, the more they face the risk of musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs) to their backs, wrists, and arms. To address the increasing risk of MSI, Learning Resources Services (LRS) examined its operations, assessed risks, and found ergonomic solutions that made their workplace safer.

*Continued on next page*

*“In the old days, a box would have been moved five times, but now it’s only moved twice.”*

*Continued from page 5*

In 2006, when Gloria Morton took her position as manager of LRS, staff told her they worried about the physical demands of their jobs. Luckily, no one had an MSI, but they were feeling the strain of their increasing workload.

“Staff were saying, ‘I don’t think I can handle this for another five to 10 years, because this is really hard work,’” says Morton, who started at LRS as a supervisor in 1994. “I didn’t want people to leave because the physical stress of the job is making them move on. I wanted to make sure people can continue doing this job as long as they want.”

### Professional opinion

Morton asked the District’s health and safety department for help. In July 2006, Nancy Johnston, the District’s occupational safety officer, worked alongside LRS staff for two days in order to get a clear picture of the work process. She saw the safety precautions already in place – including steel-toed boots, safety meetings, and safe-lifting signs – but the risk of MSI was still there. In fact, this MSI risk was slightly greater among LRS workers because the

majority of them are between 40 and 55, an age at which our bodies start to lose range of motion and flexibility.

“Our posture is not as good as we age, and our ability to lift and carry correctly is affected by posture,” says Johnston.

“Unexpected bumps or shocks, such as almost dropping a box and then jerking to keep it from falling, can cause more serious injury than it would in a younger person.

“We always try to take a positive approach to health and safety issues, and are continually searching for ways to improve things.”

### Sheer volume

Johnston watched workers lowering pallets of books from delivery trucks to the ground. Working from the pallet, they opened boxes, counted books, sorted books, placed them into boxes, labelled boxes, put them on carts, and placed them on tables around the perimeter of the floor area in alphabetical order. They filled orders for individual schools using printed order sheets, picking order items from different piles, and sorting them into empty boxes on the floor. Johnston

## Health & Safety Summit Series 2008



### Working Safely...Living Safely



The BC Safety Council is proud to present the **Health & Safety Summit Series 2008**. This exciting OH&S educational event will be held at **Prince George, Kelowna, Victoria & Langley**.

Focusing on cutting edge safety, legal & regulatory issues, topics include: Construction Safety, Young Worker Safety, Driver Safety, Supervisor Safety Mgt., Due Diligence, Legal Responsibilities & much more. Learn about changing legislation, emerging issues affecting your workplace, new & innovative solutions to reduce injuries. There is something for everyone!

Call toll free **1-800-420-7730** for more info!

#### Limited Seats Available!

Call today to reserve yours.  
**JOIN US** for Day 1 Sessions & Lunch Free of charge\*.

**Day 1 Sessions** incl.: Young Worker Safety -  
Young Driver Safety - Contractor / Owner  
Responsibilities\* (\*nominal fee charged for this session)

**Day 2 - Day 3 Sessions** incl.: Skills for Supervisors -  
Confined Space Awareness - Fall Protection Awareness  
- Hazard Avoidance Tactics (Driver Safety) - Risk  
Assessment - Accident Investigations

**BC Safety Council**  
2225 - 21331 Gordon Way  
Richmond, BC  
Call Toll Free: 1-800-420-7730  
[www.safetycouncil.bc.ca](http://www.safetycouncil.bc.ca)

counted an average of 575 lifts a day.

“Each move from and to ground level has a higher risk for MSI than does moving from waist height to waist height,” says Johnston. “I worried that the sheer number of lifts coupled with the pressure of order volume would be fatiguing, leading to errors in judgment and, potentially, injuries.”

In response to Johnston’s assessment, LRS purchased four adjustable roller conveyors that allow staff to move books at waist height with minimal bending and lifting from the floor. The roller conveyors can be raised and lowered, which allows staff to unload pallets, open boxes, and process the books at waist height. LRS staff no longer unload the trucks themselves; instead, they ask the courier delivery drivers to unload shipments directly onto carts or the roller conveyors.

“We can change the height of the table’s legs, so when trucks are coming in and going out, we can actually roll it right up to their back door and they can put the stuff on,” says Cathy Kozlowski, senior resources clerk in charge of warehouse operations. “In the old days, a box would

have been moved five times, but now it’s only moved twice. No doubt there’s still lifting, but it’s greatly reduced. It saves on your back and arms.”

### Morale booster

Senior resources clerk Colleen Jager has worked at LRS for 19 years. She says her department is “really big on the preventative,” and describes how the new tables have helped. “Now everything stays on this conveyor and you just slide it along,” she says. “The conveyor tables have made a big, big difference.”

Jager says staff feel cared for when managers like Morton advocate for solutions in response to their health and safety concerns. Morale goes up when management attends to the safety and comfort of workers.

“The atmosphere in here is great and due, in large part, to Gloria. If anybody has any problems, they can easily come and talk to her,” Jager says. “People need to listen to their staff because they’re the ones who are doing the job. They really need to listen if somebody says, ‘This is too hard’ or ‘We need a better way to do this.’”





Providing advice, assistance, representation and training on claim, assessment and occupational health and safety issues.

Check our website for upcoming seminar dates  
[www.labour.gov.bc.ca/eao](http://www.labour.gov.bc.ca/eao)

Contact us Toll Free: 1-800-925-2233

All services provided without cost to employers

**HELPING EMPLOYERS MANAGE WORKERS' COMPENSATION**



## Are Your Staff Working Alone?



## Not Anymore...

**Working Alone?** provides a unique level of safety to help protect your employees in the event of unforeseen circumstances while they are working alone in an office or field environment.

**Working Alone?** is an easy to use, automated, Internet-based tracking system that works with your cellular phone or computer. No additional hardware is required. In the event of an emergency, the system automatically phones the designated contact personnel to enable a timely personal response.

**Working Alone?** is a cost-effective solution to help ensure the safety of those who work alone and to assist employers in complying with Bill C-45 and WorkSafeBC requirements (OHS Regulation section 4.21).

Call us for more information or to set up a FREE 30 day trial account.

Phone: 604-513-1027  
Toll Free: 1-866-513-7808  
Email: [info@ruworkingalone.com](mailto:info@ruworkingalone.com)  
[www.ruworkingalone.com](http://www.ruworkingalone.com)