



Preventing Musculoskeletal Disorders in Cleaning Staff

> Scot Young Research Ltd



Introduction

In the UK every year, an estimated 38.8 million working days are lost due to occupational injuries. The nature and causes of these injuries may vary, from sprains and breakages sustained from trips or falls in the workplaces, to stress and anxiety related to work, but among the most notable conditions reported consistently over the years are musculoskeletal disorders.

Broadly defined as injuries or conditions that impact the musculoskeletal system, including the muscles, joints, bones, tendons and nerves, the disorder encompasses numerous specific issues that result in impaired movement and pain felt across different parts of the body. Accounting for 8.9 million days of work missed every year, MSDs are one of the most common types of physical occupational injury or ill-health across all industries, second only to stress, depression or anxiety in the total number of days lost across the country.

Those suffering from musculoskeletal-related injuries are likely to miss more working days than other minor injuries sustained whilst at work, taking 18.4 days off compared to the national average of 17.6 days lost due to work-related ill health.



> MSDS AND THE CLEANING INDUSTRY

For those working in the cleaning industry, musculoskeletal disorders are a similarly common occurrence.

Consistently across different countries, business types and industry sectors, MSDs make up the vast majority of all injuries reported by cleaning operatives. Indeed, so common are they that research has shown that in just one year, as many as $\frac{3}{4}$ of cleaning and janitorial operatives will experience aches and pains of some kind, with more than half of these injuries being severe enough to require medical assistance and around 80% resulting in time missed off work to recover.

Although instances of MSDs seem to be prevalent in all occupations, cleaning operatives appear to be particularly at risk.

This is largely due to the nature of work that they must perform, with routine cleaning duties requiring a considerable amount of repetitive movements throughout the working day, from mopping and vacuuming, to scrubbing and polishing.

These activities can put a lot of strain on the body, over time resulting in considerable pain for the individual, possibly leading to permanent damage to muscles or tendons. Although musculoskeletal disorders can impact any part of the body, the most common areas where pain is experienced are the wrists, knees, shoulders, neck and lower back, the latter two being the most frequent sites where moderate to severe pain is reported.

Injuries in all these areas can impact not only productivity whilst at work, but also general capability and quality of life outside work.



Aside from the nature of the work itself causing strain injuries, there are a range of other factors that have been highlighted to explain the higher than average prevalence of injury in cleaning staff. For instance, cleaning operatives often have to cope with heavy workloads and pressure to complete their tasks as quickly as possible, particularly in busy, fast-paced environments, which may result in strain on the individual cleaning.

This may explain the particularly high rates of injury amongst cleaning staff working in hospitals, where, research has shown, operatives are almost three times as likely to experience pain or injury as a result of their work compared to staff working in other areas, with strain and other musculoskeletal complaints the most common cause of this.

Taking regular breaks from repeated activity is one way of alleviating these symptoms, but in busy periods or high pressure environments, it is not always possible to do this as much as is necessary.

The importance of training also cannot be understated as a preventative measure against injury amongst cleaning staff, as conducting tasks in specific methods or postures can cause strain or worsen existing symptoms. However, in many cases, it is the equipment that operatives are using that can be identified as the primary cause of strain when cleaning, due to unsuitable design.

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Thus, the best solution in preventing MSDs is to turn to more innovative tools, to assist cleaning operatives in doing their jobs efficiently without compromising on comfort and safety.

In recent years, there has been a trend towards creating equipment for use in cleaning that prioritises ergonomics alongside overall performance.

An ergonomic product is one that can be defined as designed or adapted to facilitate use, optimising it not only for the task at hand, but also for the person operating it and the environment in which it is used.

In so doing, any discomfort or physical stress previously experienced doing the task is reduced, and overall efficiency and productivity is improved.

> SYR: ERGONOMIC SOLUTIONS

Mopping, wet mopping using a string mop and standard bucket, is among the most common tasks that a cleaning operative may be required to do, with almost 90% of workers mopping and wiping floors on a frequent basis. It is also one of the most time-consuming, as well as one of the most strenuous – 63% of those doing this task have reported experiencing musculoskeletal pain associated with it.

As a result, it is apparent that seeking more ergonomic solutions and alternatives to mopping tools will have far reaching benefits for cleaning staff, minimising the risk of injuries and improving efficiency and productivity in the process.

Informed by its beginnings as a small window cleaning service, SYR understands the demands placed upon cleaning operatives by their work, and so has placed ergonomics and ease of use at vital importance in the design and manufacturing of various cleaning products.

As part of a continuous process to develop and modernise mopping products over many years, SYR's Long Tall Sally was created to provide a premium solution to a range of mopping tasks in different environments.

A mopping combo complete with a 16 litre capacity mobile bucket and aluminium wringer, every element of the LTS has been carefully considered and designed for maximum efficiency and performance.



A close-up photograph of a blue metal component, likely part of a mop wringer. The component is shaped like a house with a pointed top and has several screws. In the center, there is a white rectangular logo with the letters 'SIR' in a bold, italicized, sans-serif font. The background is dark.

The main feature that makes the LTS stand out amongst other similar products on the market is its ergonomic design, formulated expressly to decrease the risk of strain injuries to operators.

As was noted previously, the shoulders, neck and back are among the most common areas of the body affected by musculoskeletal pain, caused primarily by strain from repeated bending and stooping when cleaning.

This kind of motion is common when mopping, as operators have to bend to refill and empty the bucket, as well as when rinsing or wringing the mop, so it is an activity that often results in pain or discomfort over time.

The tall height and long wringer handle of the LTS is designed to prevent this, reducing the need to stoop or bend to use and producing a more comfortable operating experience.

Arm and wrist pain is also a frequent complaint experienced by mopping professionals due to the awkward posture and repetitive motions that are required when in using a mop and bucket. This strain is often magnified by two factors: a heavy, water-sodden mop head which makes movement harder, and an ineffective wringer that is difficult to use and does not adequately squeeze out enough water to reduce mop weight. The wringer fitted onto the LTS has a high quality and durable construction, and has been expressly designed with ergonomics in mind. The long lever, complete with comfortable soft handle grip, is touch-responsive and can be used without the need for excessive force, extracting the maximum amount of water out of the mop head. Not only does this reduce strain on the operator, but it stops floors from being needlessly wet, allowing them to dry quickly and without smears, as well as preventing possible slip accidents that may occur on surfaces.

The LTS has been fitted with a number of extra features that facilitate use and provide a more comfortable operating experience to reduce strain and discomfort.

With four sturdy legs and easy-glide castors, the LTS can be easily manoeuvred when in use, eliminating the need to lift and carry the heavy bucket, an action which is another common cause of musculoskeletal injury of the back in particular.

Aiding to this further, the LTS can be converted into a small trolley system with the addition of compatible clip-on SYR Hangan Buckets, ideal for storing other cleaning equipment for the operator's convenience.

Even with these features, unlike many similar large size buckets, the LTS is guaranteed to not tip when in use, saving valuable time that would otherwise be spent cleaning up spillages.





References

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