

pression system at the generating station in Tiverton, Ontario. They were walking single file along a narrow walkway made of iron grating when the lead worker fell through an opening, dropping about 8.4 metres to a platform below, says a statement from Ontario's Ministry of Labour (MOL). The workers were unaware of the opening, created earlier that day when other workers had removed a section of the grated flooring while dismantling scaffolding in the area.

In March of 2005, the injured worker's employer, Vipond Inc., received fines totalling \$150,000 after the company was found guilty of failing to ensure an appropriate guardrail was used. Bruce Power had contracted Vipond to design and install a fire suppression system at the generating station.

Mark Contini, the lawyer representing Bruce Power and the two individuals, argued that Crown counsel had obtained an investigation report, designed for the defence, without a warrant and was planning to use the report as part of the prosecution.

The report "was found to be protected by both solicitor-client and litigation privilege," Contini says. The MOL's conduct "in accessing this privileged document and having the knowledge that came from reviewing the privileged document made it impossible for us to be fairly tried."

The report, Contini says, contained information about the incident obtained by interviewing, among other means, individuals, including the accused. "Of course, everyone that was interviewed in the course of this gave this information and were advised that what they were providing was information that would be protected from disclosure."

Justice of the Peace Woodworth agreed, dismissing all charges.

Certain *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* protections apply to individuals only, Contini says. But Section 11, which details the right to a fair trial, "has been repeatedly found to be a right that a corporate accused is entitled to and enjoys as well."

Work-related stress proves to be tough on the heart

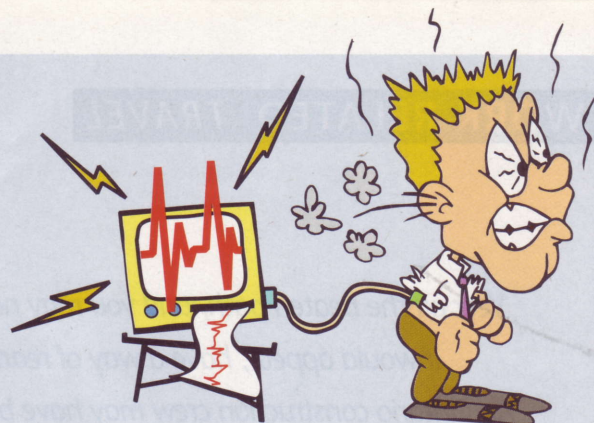
By Trisha Richards

It seems stress at the office can cause more than a little resentment or a splitting headache.

A recent British study adds weight to the idea of a link between job stress and heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular problems. More than 10,000 civil servants, aged 35 to 55, were studied over a 14-year period. Participants were checked four times over the life of the study via surveys and measurements of their blood pressure, cholesterol and other components.

After accounting for risk factors such as smoking and a lack of exercise, researchers concluded that employees with chronic work-related stress have more than double the odds of developing illnesses such as heart disease or diabetes than those without work stress.

Participants who most often reported work stress over the four checks were identified as having prolonged work stress. Researchers determined prolonged exposure to stress on the job may also affect the autonomic nervous system and neuroendocrine activity directly, contributing to the development of metabolic syndrome. This is a cluster of risk factors — such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and obesity — that increases



author, says the findings are among the first "that actually show that work stress appears to have a very strong affect on biological risk factors for heart disease, mainly the metabolic syndrome."

Further, the study was able to measure work stress not just at one single moment in time, but four times over a 14-year period while on-the-job stress was accumulating. From a dose-response perspective, the study reports, the greater the exposure to job stress, the greater risk of the metabolic syndrome.

"The study wasn't able to go into possible interventions for relieving work stress," Chandola says, but previous research has shown that changes in workload and to the work environment may help lessen stress on the job.

Job strain cannot be completely avoided, says Dr. Brian Baker, a spokesperson for the Heart and Stroke Foundation and a psychiatrist who specializes in cardiac health and stress. "Most of us work seven or eight hours or more for months and years, and it does take a toll on the cardiovascular system," Dr. Baker says. When one develops job strain, he explains, blood pressure will begin to rise, which is a risk factor for heart disease.

But that process doesn't happen overnight, Dr. Baker emphasizes. It would take years of high blood pressure for work-related stress to lead to heart disease and stroke, he continues.

Employers should take steps to implement strategies that minimize pressure in the work environment, suggests Beverly Beuermann-King, a stress and wellness expert. Beuermann-King recommends that companies take a seven-step approach she calls L.E.A.D.E.R.S.

This espouses the importance of the following: *living* healthy (what a company is doing to promote that); *environment* (things such as training, emergency preparedness and ergonomics all play a part); *attaining* balance (options such as telecommuting, flexible shifts and leaves for child and elder care can help employees strike a healthy work-life balance); *dynamics* and company culture (company leaders should ask questions such as, What are we doing to create a culture that brings about engagement? Do people want to be here?); *employee* benefits (determine if, for example, benefits are adequate and there is access to health information); *remuneration* of benefits (pay should be fair and benefits coverage sufficient); and *support* (consider what is being done regarding, say, team building and employee recognition).

For every dollar companies spend on comprehensive wellness programs for their employees, says Beuermann-King, the return on their investment seems to be anywhere from three to six dollars.

But employees also need to take some ownership for the state of their health, suggests information from the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. Sharing a joke, reading the comics, and trying to see the humour in a stressful situation can be helpful. Taking several deep breaths and regular stretch breaks