

Topic: Ergonomics and WCB Claims in the Home Office Environmentⁱ

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Hello Mount Royal Faculty Association members,

While faculty continue to work from home, we want to remind you that the University must ensure you have appropriate equipment to do your job safely and accommodate any medical restrictions you might have. If you are injured while working from home, you can (and must) still file a workers' compensation claim. This advisory outlines the University's obligations and how the MRFA can assist should you have any difficulties.

Provision of Appropriate Equipment

The dispersal of MRU faculty to home offices in March meant that many MRU faculty did not have adequate furnishings and/or equipment with which to work. In some cases, faculty were allowed to remove chairs and computer monitors from offices. The Association also made efforts to make funds available for faculty to resolve the lack of adequate equipment for staff. These funds were taken from faculty members' personal professional development expense allotments, applications for unspent faculty development, or the contract faculty PD fund.

If you believe your home office equipment is inadequate, you can undertake the following actions:

- If you are a full-time faculty member and you have not used your personal PD allotment to purchase required ergonomic home office furniture, you may still do so. The application form is available [here](#).
- Contract faculty can apply to the contract PD Fund.
- If you are not eligible for contract PD funds (that is, you are a contract member who teaches less than three courses in this academic year), contact Heidi Peterson, Ability Management Consultant, with a carbon copy to the Association, requesting the needed equipment.
- If your personal situation necessitates expenses beyond your available PD funds you can contact Heidi Peterson, MRU's Ability Management Consultant, with a carbon copy to the Association, requesting the needed equipment.

Here are some instances where you should contact the Association.

- If MRU does not follow up with you promptly, notify labourRelations@mrfa.net
- If MRU promises to provide equipment (e.g., delivering your chair or desk to your home) but then does not, please contact LabourRelations@mrfa.net.

Duty to Accommodate

Alberta's Human Rights Act requires employers to accommodate workers' needs based upon certain protected grounds. For example, workers may require modified work duties or equipment due to a disability. Or they may require an accommodation to care for family obligations. MRU's duty to accommodate employees is far reaching and requires the employer to be flexible and creative in accommodating an employee. For more information refer to page 4 of the recent Members Advisory on [Medical Leaves, Return to Work and Accommodations](#).

If you previously had an accommodation while working from a physical office (e.g., a sit-stand desk or a flexible work schedule), you should seek to have these accommodations transferred to your home office.

If you run into difficulty, please contact the MRFA office at LabourRelations@mrfa.net.

Workers' Compensation (WCB)

If you experience an injury or illness caused by work that requires you to miss time from work, have your work duties modified, or seek medical treatment beyond first aid, you are required to [report the injury](#) to MRU and the [Workers' Compensation Board \(WCB\)](#). (MRU and your doctor are also required to report such an injury).

Reporting an injury to the WCB may entitle you to wage-loss and other vocational rehabilitation benefits. More importantly, a workers' compensation claim creates a record you were injured at work (in case your injury worsens).

Some brief facts to keep in mind about WCB:

- You cannot be fired or disciplined for filing a WCB claim
- WCB is a no-fault system, you can still be covered even if you caused the incident that led to injury
- You have the right to choose your own doctor in the case of WCB, you are not required to use an employer doctor (WCB may require you to use one of their own doctors)

If you are injured, it is very important that you seek medical treatment and report an injury as soon as possible as waiting may affect your coverage or the success of your claim.

If you are injured while working from home, you may still be covered for an injury sustained at a home office. WCB takes several factors into in such cases, such as if activity is on work time or the activity was for the employer's benefit. Not all injuries sustained while working from home will entitle you to WCB coverage. Injuring your back due to poor ergonomic setup while working at your computer may be covered. Slipping when you go to refill your coffee is unlikely to be covered.

Neither your accepting of funds, nor specifics of how the funds were used, for home office setup will affect your ability to file for WCB.

If you have filed for WCB and have been denied, please contact the MRFA's Labour Relations Officer as soon as possible as we will only have one year from the date of denial to appeal the decision.

ⁱ Source: AUFA Blog - Richard Roach, Executive Director – AUFA. <https://aufa.ca/blog/2021/1/7/ergonomics-accommodations-and-injuries-while-working-from-home>