

## Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act

2:03 p.m.

[Chairman: Mr. Ady]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome the Hon. Peter Trynchy with us this afternoon. He's before the committee to respond to questions and perhaps give us an overview of the status of the grant received by his department known as the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety heritage grant program. His department did receive funding in the last fiscal year. Questions would be appropriate particularly directed to the grant program. Questions otherwise pertaining to workers' compensation and other things pertaining to his department are more appropriately directed during estimates and the budget process. The Chair would request that members try to keep their questions focused to the heritage grant program.

Mr. Minister, would you like to introduce your department people with you and give a brief overview of events in the last year pertaining to the grant program? Then we'll turn the time to the committee for questions.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Yes, I would like to introduce my group. To my right is Hilary Lynas; she's the manager of the heritage grant program. On my far left is Pat Gottselig; she's my executive assistant. Denis Lyons, executive director, program support services, is on my immediate left.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, this program was started in 1981. Initially \$10 million was set aside from the heritage fund, and now we're into our 12th year. We have funded projects that have addressed a number of high priority problem areas in a broad range of industries including oil and gas, forestry, manufacturing, and construction. In addition, the program has helped to train Alberta workers and employers to recognize, control, and avoid health and safety hazards. It also helped to expand professional education in occupational health and safety, opening up new career opportunities in Alberta in fields such as occupational medicine, nursing, hygiene, safety engineering, and others. It also has provided programs in safe communities, and one that we're all familiar with is the Heroes program, which has gone over very, very well.

Programs such as this take some time to put into place and to work, but when we look back over the last 11 years, we see very encouraging signs. Provincial lost-time accidents have declined steadily over the last decade. Just to give you an example: in the year 1990-91 we had a 12 percent reduction in injuries, and it's moved from 5 percent to 4.4 percent in the province of Alberta. Injury rates in industries where the grant program has focused its resources, including oil and gas well drilling and servicing, forestry, and welding, have decreased substantially, and that's a very positive move. The program has also supported research at the University of Alberta in production of fire-resistant work clothing, and an Alberta company is now providing that service to Alberta and manufacturing the clothing here.

The grant program has also attracted significant additional federal and private funding. For every dollar the grant program has put into research since 1986, another 32 cents have been raised from the federal government to continue this research, and project costs are often shared with grant recipients and other supporters. In the last three years for every grant dollar awarded, industry and the federal government have contributed 56 cents towards grant projects. So that's been very positive. A contribution of \$390,000 was made

towards the start-up costs of courses in safety engineering. This support helped the University of Alberta raise an additional \$800,000 from corporate donors such as Shell, Nova, Dow Chemical, Imperial Oil, Du Pont, Union Carbide, Celanese, and PanCanadian, and the list goes on. The grant program: we have a number of funded projects. Just quickly: AADAC is one; Alberta Logging Association, which had put together a forestry contract safety manual; a video for small business entitled *Strike Out Injuries*; and the list goes on. We've also provided a grant to the Alberta Healthcare Association which will provide information in regards to injuries in nursing homes, senior citizens' residences, as well as hospitals. This program has been evaluated twice since its initiation, in 1986 and again in 1991. Over the last 11 years 599 applications were received, and 216 applications have been funded. The evaluation program identifies a long-term need and a long-term commitment for this program to reduce injuries.

Mr. Chairman and members, that was a brief overview. I supplied you all with last year's annual report and documents. We're now prepared to answer any questions, and I have two capable people on either side of me to answer your questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Westlock-Sturgeon, followed by Calgary-Fish Creek.

MR. TAYLOR: Hello to the minister and his assistants. I don't know if you're hard to work for or if you're just a very good training ground. You have different faces every year. You only have the one repeat this year. I recognize her from last year.

One of the things that's intriguing me, Mr. Minister, is your program on tobacco and alcohol and also the access to tobacco and alcohol to high school students. In other words, I know you're working in the workplace, but what are you doing to try to get an attitude developed when they're 12 or 13 years old, long before they hit the workplace?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I'm not sure that fits within this program. It would seem to me that's something that belongs in AADAC. Perhaps you could refocus your question.

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Chairman, we do have programs in the schools. We have the Heroes program. We also have other programs in regards to substance abuse.

Denis.

MR. LYONS: Well, we have the adopt a school program which twins companies, industry, with schools, and it deals with general hazards that are in the workplace. It doesn't specifically deal with smoking as a topic, but it tries to introduce young people while they're still at school to the need to work safely and what hazards they might face when they get to work.

MR. TAYLOR: What percentage of your total budget would be spent on that high school aged group in teaching them prevention.

MR. LYONS: I don't have the exact number. I think it's a very small percentage of the budget, but we essentially work with companies, and companies put a fair bit of effort into this. It's normally people time. We have our regional offices who recruit companies, twin them with schools, and the companies do much of the work.

MR. TAYLOR: My third supplementary would be: wouldn't you agree that the attitudes in the workplace are pretty well developed in

the schools? In other words, when they're 12 or 13, their attitudes in the workplace towards everything from danger to drugs are pretty well developed.

MR. LYONS: Well, I think attitudes do develop. We do try and concentrate on young workers because we know that, on a per hundred person-year's work, a young worker tends to get injured more often than an experienced worker, so we try and direct some of our efforts to young workers. We do believe that if you give proper orientation and training to a worker when they get to the workplace, they can work safely, and if they have attitudes which are not consistent that were developed earlier, they can be refocused.

MR. TRYNCHY: It should be remembered, Mr. Chairman, that it's occupational health and safety in the workplace. We do not have a budget for entering into schools. We do have the 10 questions, which a lot of the members have asked for, which they send out to the graduating students and high school students, and it's something that is available to all of you, if you wish. Just give me a note on how many you need.

MR. TAYLOR: I was just trying to give you authority to get into the schools.

2:13

MR. TRYNCHY: Well, you should talk to the Minister of Education.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by Stony Plain.

[Mr. Jonson in the Chair]

MR. PAYNE: Mr. Chairman, I guess I'm on a similar theme. I'd refer the minister to page 4 of the annual report and page 33 of the heritage fund annual report. The data I've read in recent years clearly establishes that cigarette smoking has become a blue-collar addiction in Alberta and across Canada. It seems to be inversely proportional to education. If you accept the assumption that cigarette smoking has become fundamentally or at least primarily a blue-collar addiction, and if you accept the assumption that lung cancer has been clearly linked to cigarette smoking, and if you accept the assumption that smoking in the workplace affects productivity -- on the basis of those three assumptions I'd like to ask the minister: is any consideration at all being given to (a) research on the question and (b) health promotion related to cigarette smoking?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Chairman, when we funded AADAC last year, I believe it was, in regards to substance abuse in the workplace, alcohol and drugs, 6.5 percent of the work force had been noted as using these things. I'm going to ask Denis to comment further in regards to a prohibition of smoking across the province. We have a number of workplaces in government which we control, such as the WCB building. It's smoke free. A number of offices have gone that route, and it probably would be the Minister of Labour with the standards of labour whether you would have a free, nonsmoking workplace in the province. We've both been asked to consider it, and I've discussed it with the Minister of Labour. We're in discussion stages right now.

Denis, can you add?

MR. LYONS: Smoking in the workplace is a contentious issue. It's a behaviour, and to the extent that people feel they might be

damaged by that, I think we can intervene. If we get a complaint, for example, that the workplace atmosphere is being contaminated by smoke, we can deal with that generally under our legislation, but we don't specifically deal with smoking as a behaviour. The Department of Health does promotional work in terms of trying to get people to stop smoking, and we are supportive of that, but we don't do it specifically ourselves.

MR. TRYNCHY: Smoking in a workplace such as a body shop or a garage where there are fumes from engines and things like that we have over the past years had some calls on, and we've sent out our inspectors and put a stop order on them. We get ventilation in there. But per se we have not addressed cigarette smoking as thoroughly as some people would like us to do.

[Mr. Ady in the Chair]

MR. PAYNE: Well, I don't know that I have a supplemental question. I hope I've made a point in the phrasing of the question. It just seems to me that we're spending a great deal of money on some quite esoteric diseases when the one that is most clearly problematical is simply being ignored.

I would also like to clarify, Mr. Chairman, that the minister in his response used the word "prohibition." I'm not advocating a prohibition. My question was a two-part question: research on the issue, which we're not doing, and health promotion related to the practice. We're also not doing a thing there either. That was the point I wanted to make. Thank you for your forbearance, Mr. Chairman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Member for Stony Plain.

MR. WOLOSHYN: I would like to thank the minister for coming here. I quite frankly don't have any problem with any of the projects that have been underlined.

However, there is one rather significant one that I find of interest, and that's to do with the laundering of protective garments. It comes in your annual report. Now, I think that was an excellent approach to take because very few workers would stop to think of the fact that the pesticides and whatever other chemicals they are working with actually accumulate in their clothing. Not only that, but there is a misconstrued idea that if you launder something, then all of a sudden it becomes automatically safe. I think this study did a very good job of pointing out that in fact it doesn't. So I would commend whoever came up with the idea of the study itself. That is sort of directed at greenhouse workers and commercial applicators, but it probably would have more relevance to the farming community in that this is where you would have the seasonal part but an intensive short term, once or twice a year. The question that I would ask is: in view of the fact that this study has come out with some very good and positive findings, has there been a concerted effort to have the distributors of the chemicals attach a very low-cost brochure or else make their labeling reflect the methods of decontamination of the clothing that you use in applying these?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Chairman, a very good question. The same thing applied to welding last year. I've asked the manufacturers of welding rods to put a message into the packages of welding rods that they sell to the welders. I think the message we want the elevator companies, those that sell it, to put into the chemicals is precisely the same. I don't know if we've gone that far yet or not, but to make a recommendation to the chemical people, I believe we've done that.

I don't know if they've complied yet or not. I'll ask Denis to see if he can follow up on it.

MR. LYONS: I think the research is still ongoing, and I think we have an example in what Dr. Crown has done in another project. She was involved in work on fire-resistant clothing, and the results have been transferred to manufacturers. I expect that when she has finished this research, she will publicize it and work with manufacturers. I don't think it's yet got to the stage where we can tell a manufacturer how they should write that label or develop that warning. One of the things that the heritage grant program does do is ask its researchers to publicize the results and to deal with suppliers, in this case of the clothing or the pesticides, that are at issue.

MR. WOLOSCHYN: I certainly accept the answer; however, in my supplementary I would ask for a comment in this direction. I would say that once the researchers have identified that in fact the product, whatever it might be, does present some degree of health problem, perhaps the direction that occupational health, if they do have the clout, or whatever other department could facilitate it -- that the onus is then on the manufacturer and the distributor to outline very clearly the safe usage of the product. That goes beyond the application because, as we are well aware, most labeling stops at: what do you do after you put it on? Rather than wait for the results to come through, if a product is identified as hazardous, I would like to see us turn it around and put the onus on the manufacturer and/or distributor to pass out the information on its safe usage. For example, in the case of contaminated clothing, that to me would be a responsibility of the chemical maker as opposed to the researchers to try and identify each one as we go. As a matter of fact, we wouldn't have enough money to do that.

MR. TRYNCHY: It's been a policy of Occupational Health and Safety, and it will continue to be, that we get that information out. In this case the information will go to the agricultural people and the chemical people to get that information out, whether it's the DAs in the field, the home economists, or else the chemical producers themselves. Once the research is finished, we will get that message out. We've done that in many cases before.

MR. WOLOSCHYN: You've partially answered another question that I had. Again I notice that the project on the welding safety videotape was completed in 1987. There has been a very large level of concern with respect to welding gases in confined spaces and the effect on the health of the welder over prolonged periods of time. There appears to be -- I would have to be careful; I won't say hard research -- quite a concern in the medical profession that welders are being exposed to inordinate amounts of gas, and again I'm speaking of confined spaces, whether that be a workshop or a pipeline. You did indicate that welding rod sellers or manufacturers will be adding some sort of cautionary of what's in them. Has there been any work done, especially through NAIT since they were the ones that were involved in this primarily, to perhaps update that particular videotape to give a greater degree of focus on the hazards of welding in enclosed spaces?

2:23

MR. TRYNCHY: Well, since we've started this program, we've provided \$127,000. We've had 180 sets of videotapes and over a thousand workbooks distributed. The companies and the schools that are now using this material are numerous. I'm not sure if we've got an updated welding document, but I've met with the welders and I've talked to the Alberta Federation of Labour. Some welders don't

like to wear a mask and some welders don't like to wear the hard helmet because of the whiplash on their neck when they flip their mask down, and all those kinds of things. It's an educational program, and we're providing as much information as we can. We're insisting in the industry that before you go on the job and weld, you know the rules and know the precautions you should take. But it's difficult. I just talked to a welder in the office the other day, and he doesn't want to use all that stuff. He said: "Look, I've been in the business 32 years. Don't tell me how to weld." So what do you do?

But you're right; we have to get that information out. That's what this grant's all about: research, get the information out, and do as much as we can to educate all the workers across the province, whether it's welders, their bosses, or whatever.

MR. LYONS: I think the emphasis is really on trying to get the existing information more widely distributed rather than updating it. I think we're satisfied, as far as I know, with the actual content of the information. It's to get that information more widely distributed, and we have made efforts in the last year or so to get it more widely distributed.

MR. TRYNCHY: I've just been notified that we do have it updated, sir, and there is a new tape now on welding in confined spaces. So we are updating our supply of material as new research comes in.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Member for Bow Valley, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

MR. MUSGROVE: Mr. Chairman and Mr. Minister, it's well known in Alberta that small business makes up a major part of our economy, yet workers injured in this workplace seem to take up a bigger share of the cost of injuries than the larger companies. What has the grant program done for small business?

MR. LYONS: I think we've had a number of projects. We've had a small business manual, a three-part manual which was widely distributed. We've had projects that try and get small business people together to look at the issues that they face. I think there are three or four others which I can't recall directly to mind. Maybe Hilary can identify some of those.

MS LYNAS: Many of the projects that have been funded by the grant program are useful to small businesses; for example, the welding videotapes that were mentioned. Many of the companies that would use those are small businesses. Another example is the safety program for logging companies, and another one is on basic safety for pesticide applicators. There was the other one that Denis referred to, the Occupational Health and Safety Manual for Small Business. So many of the different projects are of relevance to the small businesses, even if their focus isn't only on small business.

MR. TRYNCHY: I guess one of the things that we put a lot of emphasis on is our Occupational Health and Safety Week, when I travel the province to every corner. You meet with small business and you talk about these things. You should know -- it's a concern -- that if you look across Canada, we have an injured worker every 15 seconds and over 60,00 injuries in the province of Alberta. So small business plays a major role. They have a lot of employees. I don't know how you'd change it. My son runs a small business, and we talk safety. We try to get the information out. It's all there. We can provide information if they ask for it, but I don't know how else you'd do it.

In my Occupational Health and Safety Week tours I stress the importance of safety and I ask all employers and employees to work together with a volunteer safety committee. That's been promoted, and more and more of it's happening every day. Workers and the employers are getting closer and closer together because the employer does pay the full shot of compensation and he wants to reduce his costs.

MR. MUSGROVE: Supplementary question, Mr. Chairman. In my constituency a lot of the injuries that I hear about and have to deal with are back injuries. Certainly I know how hard this is for the department to deal with, but what has the heritage grant program done about back injuries?

MS LYNAS: Currently the grant program has five projects in progress looking at back injuries. One of them is with the Alberta Workers' Health Centre, and they have an innovative project going on where they're taking an ergonomic approach which is targeted at workers. Normally, programs targeted at workers look at proper lifting techniques and don't look at how to change the workplace to make it safer. The intent of this project is that once a suitable program is developed, it will be offered as an adult education program by school boards and community colleges on an ongoing basis.

We also have two projects going which involve health care industries. One is looking at injuries and illnesses, including back injuries, in hospitals, nursing homes, and senior citizens' residences. Another one is looking at health and safety programs for long-term care facilities, where a number of back injuries also occur. There's one other research project going on at the University of Alberta, where they're looking at nurses and back strength and how that affects their ability to perform different tasks. The final project that's going on at the moment is a conference coming up in Calgary in November which will take an ergonomic approach to back injuries as well. In addition, we've supported three other previous projects.

MR. TRYNCHY: Just getting off the subject a little bit, we now have a Window of Opportunity that's a separate deal with the hospitals. The number one industry in Alberta that has the most frequency of claims is hospitals. It's all back strains and muscle strains. So we are moving as quickly as we can through workers' compensation with the Window of Opportunity. That's something separate, but we do have some funding for the University of Alberta in regards to the workers' centre here. But you're right on; 30 percent of our cases in the province now on compensation are back claims.

MR. MUSGROVE: Mr. Chairman, the minister alluded a few minutes ago to the fact that the employer pays the full cost of compensation, which I totally agree should be that way. But we do seem to be running into problems with workers that have back injuries particularly, but not necessarily, getting back into the workplace, because their record of injuries goes with them to the new employer. Employers then take on that responsibility of hiring this worker knowing that they have a history of some type of injury. I hear quite a lot of that through the people that I talk to: "How do I get back into the workplace now? I've got a history of injuries, and they don't want to hire me because they are afraid to take me on." They start up, number one, with that on their record.

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Chairman, that's a separate deal with compensation, but there is no way that we provide the information.

If you're an injured worker and you move from one job to another, there is no transcript of your cases. That is confidential. That does not move. So if you're the injured worker and you want to work for somebody else, if you're asked and you tell the employer what's wrong with you, that's the only way they'll know, because they do not get it from us. That's a separate deal. They don't get it from us. No.

MR. MUSGROVE: But most employers now ask.

MR. TRYNCHY: Well, we can't change that, but we do not provide the information. That's confidential.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly.

2:33

MS MJOLSNESS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to just refer to the safety and loss management program as contained within the grant program. From what I've read in the document, I understand that this is a course that is developed for students and is open to third- and fourth-year engineering and business students at the U of A. Now, it says that this educational effort will "pay off when . . . students reach management positions." I was thinking when I was reading this that unless employers and businesses recognize the value of the course, then these students wouldn't necessarily ever reach management positions. I mean, there's no guarantee that they will reach management positions. So I'm wondering if there's any effort being put into educating business and managers in the value of this course so that they do promote their new employees to management positions.

MR. TRYNCHY: Well, I think that would be automatic. When we talk to industry and employers, we talk about the value of injury reduction. If you're going to hire one of us here and you find out that she has the qualifications, has taken that training in safety, then she would be promoted ahead of the other three. I don't know how we'd do it. We just insist that injury reduction must take place and put in the best people. We do have courses right in the workplace with them. They're involved, the employer and employees.

MS MJOLSNESS: Are you finding, then, that that in fact is happening, that new employees who have this course are being promoted more quickly than others? Do you monitor that at all?

MR. TRYNCHY: I think we see that. I've talked to some employers, and they say, "We have these people on staff with that very qualification." Some even hire from universities. You know, I'm sure there are places where it doesn't happen, but some industries, some employers hire people with that qualification because they put them in the very position of safety instructor to the rest of the work force.

MS MJOLSNESS: Well, that's good to hear. I mean, hopefully that is happening.

Supplementary, Mr. Chairman. I noticed also in this annual report that there's been quite a bit of work, as we've already heard, in prevention of back injuries. I notice that there's some research going on on the chronic painters' syndrome. I was just wondering if there's been any research or any grant money given to developing or researching what we call chronic pain syndrome, which is a fairly new syndrome that I know is being recognized now by WCB, or if you plan to in fact put money into that area.

MR. TRYNCHY: We don't have a chronic pain research grant right now. The way this works is that when they apply for these grants, it goes through a committee. As you see on the back page of this document, the steering committee then approves them. We don't have as many people applying for certain things as could be applying. It's difficult for us to push something when the grant money is given to industry and to other people out there on their initiative, but if there's a way we can do it -- I don't know.

MR. LYONS: I don't think it's an area where we would say no. I think to fund it, we would have to have a fairly strong connection between the chronic pain and some workplace origin for the injury. We don't really have the funds or the mandate to fund research into problems that are generic and may have multiple causes. We have to be fairly focused on the workplace.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Beverly, followed by the Member for Lacombe.

MR. EWASIUK: Thank you Mr. Chairman. I, too, want to commend the minister and staff on the tabulation of this material for our information. I found it quite interesting. I really wasn't aware that we were providing funding for such a wide variety of groups, universities, and so on in looking at the various health and safety aspects of the work force. However, Mr. Minister, I do note that there are about three, perhaps more, grants that have been awarded to the Alberta Safety Council for long-term care, for example. I support that one particularly. I was going to ask about the service industry generally, but certainly long-term care and the facilities particularly. There are more and more people now living in lodges, for example, that perhaps previously were in nursing homes. The lodges aren't being provided with the type of mechanical lifts and so on that could be required. I'm wondering whether this particular long-term care facility study is going to include lodges as well, or are you going more to the nursing home type of study? Do you know that?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure if we pick and choose. Just to give you an example, I was in an auxiliary hospital just a short while ago, and then I visited the General hospital in Calgary and went through the whole facility. What we're seeing more and more are mechanical lifts so the nurses do not have to move these people, because there's some concern about the frequency of hospital workers' injuries. They're putting them in, and they're working. So we have this kind of equipment available to help people, whether in the bathroom or in the beds, but we're not picking and choosing in regards to lodges or nursing homes. I believe the nursing homes are moving on their own. It was a private-sector hospital that I visited. The senior citizens' lodges themselves usually don't have the people that are injured there. They take care of themselves. So it's nursing homes and auxiliary hospitals where you have the need. As for lodges, I don't know if there's a need for it, unless you can be specific, member.

MR. EWASIUK: I don't want to be specific, but what I was saying earlier was that the population in lodges is tending to be substantially older than normally we used to be aware of. There are now occasions developing more frequently in lodges where indeed there's a need to assist the residents off their beds or perhaps, as you suggest, to the washroom, to a bath perhaps or something along those lines. That is happening. I had some inquiries, in fact, about that exact issue. I'm just wondering whether the co-ordinator of the

grants is aware of the mandate, that the request was made to make a study for hospital workers, and whether in fact lodges were part of that mandate.

MR. TRYNCHY: I don't think the steering committee would turn down any application for a grant for research if they can justify it; not at all, no. If the lodges request it and there's somebody there to put the application in, I'm sure the grant steering committee would look at it.

MR. EWASIUK: Okay. My second question then, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, is also somewhat toward small business, as the Member for Bow Valley did speak to it, and also the videos. I think the videos are a good method and vehicle for promoting safety, and I'm just wondering if you have a record of the types of entries small business has in getting the use of the videos. We provide material for them. I guess my question is: do they take advantage of what's available to them?

MR. TRYNCHY: I'm sure most do. We have all kinds of booklets and information available, and Occupational Health and Safety is working closely now with the Workers' Compensation Board. So if any new material comes out, we have very quick access to the mailing list of those people that have a file with workers' compensation, and that's the way we correspond with each other. So it's there. What's the old saying? You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. It's available and we're promoting it, but whether the access of those books is taken up, I'm not sure.

MR. EWASIUK: Okay. Thank you. My final question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That's your last question. You've had three, hon. member.

The Member for Lacombe.

MR. MOORE: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I think the minister and I over the years have discussed this area of research, and I've always expressed a concern that research dollars aren't bringing results that justify the amount of dollars spent. I've always questioned the criteria by which we award a lot of these and the follow-up of what happens to the dollars we put into research.

2:43

First of all, I want to talk about back injuries. I notice that again this year under back problems there are I think four or five areas studying it or looking at it and reviewing it. Still one of our number one causes of concern in the workplace is back injury. Every year we see more academics and groups willing to jump in and study the subject, but every year I see us no closer to coming to any conclusion one way or the other on improving the situation. I think that if you look at it, you'll see that the number of back injuries hasn't gone down. In fact, I haven't even seen the statistics, but I'll guarantee they've gone up. We see that a lot of back injuries are related to other causes. Economic times seem to bring on lots of back injuries. It's unfortunate, but this happens. You'll notice in every one of the MLA offices how soon the back injuries hit the MLAs' desks. I've had a back injury, Mr. Edmonton-Meadowlark, very much. I've had my back fused, so I understand what I'm talking about. Anyway, Mr. Chairman, I would like to know just where we're going with back injuries, whether we're gaining anything. Or are we just wasting money year after year by giving these groups money to go out there and reinvent the wheel?

MR. TRYNCHY: Well, we think we're gaining, but you're right: we seem to have a number of back injuries. I don't know what the reasons are. As I've said, the back injuries in compensation are crowding 30 percent. We provided the Alberta Workers' Health Centre \$55,000 under this program to develop a workshop for workers and small business in regards to back injuries. The Alberta Healthcare Association got \$56,000 for developing ways to reduce back injuries in hospitals, nursing homes, senior citizens; the University of Alberta, funding for the same thing.

I guess when you talk to doctors -- and I've asked this question, and I guess you have too -- they say the most difficult injury to diagnose is a back injury. I don't know if there's an answer to are we gaining ground or not in regards to back injuries? We have the work centre in Calgary that has designed a machine that tests the back, and I've been through it. There are a number of ways they do it, but whether you can fake a back injury or not, I'm not sure. I can't tell you, unless somebody here is better equipped with the knowledge in regards to whether we're making progress or not. The back injury is a concern for us in the workplace. Yes, definitely so.

MR. LYONS: Injuries in total did go down between 1990 and 1991. If you look at the Workers' Compensation Board's compensable claims, they went down from about 43,000 to about 38,000 in one year. I believe that back injuries probably didn't go down at the same rate but that they were at least controlled and, I think, starting on the down slope.

I think what the heritage grant program has tried to do in dealing with back injuries is not do academic research on back injuries but give money to groups such as the Alberta Healthcare Association and the Long Term Care Association which work in areas where there are a lot of back injuries and get them to try to solve the problems. I think the long-term care safety council was one grant directed at back injuries among others, and the grant to the Alberta Healthcare Association will also address the same sort of issue.

MR. MOORE: Supplementary, Mr. Chairman. In going into the annual report here under Substance Use and the Alberta Workplace, I see a steady \$165,000 into that. I look at the results of it -- I've circled them here -- and it says: "Eighty per cent of Alberta workers surveyed consumed an alcoholic beverage in the past 12 months." They go on to drug use: "Relatively low levels of illicit drug use were reported by Alberta workers . . . few workers . . . use illicit drugs." And it comes to: "What's next?"

"The results show that substance use in the Alberta workplace is not a huge problem," says AADAC's Sawka. "However, it can have a serious impact and therefore we can't afford to be complacent. At the same time there's no reason to overreact."

For \$165,000 I don't think they have identified one thing we didn't know and common sense didn't tell you: that we have drinking problems out there in the workplace, and we have some drug use. It's not rampant; it's there. We knew that. All they did was verify it for \$165,000. Then he says: don't overreact. I guess we shouldn't overreact. We shouldn't have given it to him in the first place.

My question comes back to another one on page 6, laundering protective garments. We gave \$190,000 to this. Now, I'd like to know: why in the world are we as government, Mr. Chairman, you and the minister and this committee sitting right here, spending \$190,000 to go into the laundering of protective garments because of pesticides and that being in them and how to get them out when the responsibility rests with the manufacturer? Why aren't we saying to the manufacturer, "You bloody well put on there how you get it out of there"? Why are we going back and doing all these tests to tell the manufacturer? He's making the profit on it. That is a

question to the minister. I'd like to understand: why are we wasting this money to go on doing this?

MR. TRYNCHY: Mr. Chairman, as we come here each year, we have a number of recommendations made by this committee that we should look at this and that. The chemical thing was raised. It was in the report that we should look at it, and we did that. Now, the grant steering committee is made up of people from labour, employers, the public, Advanced Education, career development, Labour, Occupational Health and Safety, personnel administration, and the Workers' Compensation Board. They review all these grant applications, and that's who recommends them, who accepts them or turns them down. They come to the minister, and if that committee approves them, I let it go ahead. But if the committee here feels that some of these things that we're doing are not right, then I would be willing to accept the recommendation from this committee that we should do something different. But, you know, I was asked to do it.

MR. MOORE: Have I another supplementary by your records, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I believe you do.

MR. MOORE: Well, I can assure the minister, Mr. Chairman, that we'll have a recommendation in, because I feel that all those people there, hopefully they weren't all paid honorariums is all I can say. Because I do not think, when I look over the way the money has been granted out here . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I need you to move to your question.

MR. MOORE: I will be bringing a recommendation through. Other than that, I haven't another supplementary.

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right.  
The Member for Westlock-Sturgeon.

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you. One of the first questions will be referring to last year's interview with the minister. In the *Hansard* he talked about:

We're doing phone surveys to Albertans in the workplace; we're doing mail surveys and phoning Alberta employers and unions. Until we get the reports that have been completed and sent to us analyzed, we can't answer that question.

My question is: what graphs and what statistics do you have between drug abuse and smoking and incomes?

MR. TRYNCHY: That was done by AADAC, and we do have the report. Do you have that?

MR. TAYLOR: That is out, is it?

MS LYNAS: Yes. On that particular question they did not find a relationship between income and drug use.

MR. TAYLOR: You didn't find any relationship at all?

MS LYNAS: No.

MR. TAYLOR: That drug abuse includes tobacco too, I guess, or does it?

MS LYNAS: No, it doesn't.

MR. TAYLOR: I see.

The other area that I want to carry over from last year -- I introduced the idea at that time that possibly with the mining of tar sands we'd have entirely new hazards in the workplace. I think it was confirmed this morning with the Minister of Energy, and AOSTRA is very proud of how they're going, and they see the start of many, many projects. Apparently I surprised you last year, because you said you'd never heard of it. Now, since then has there been any work done on the peculiar hazards there are to mining the tar sands? It's similar to coal mining but even more volatile. You'd have different types of hazards that you'd have to look at. It's also very sulphur laden. The sulphur's free; it's not bound like it is in coal. So have you done anything in that area?

MR. LYONS: We haven't done any research on tar sands in the past year. We had done some related research in past years, particularly in relation to hydrogen sulphide, which is one of the potential hazards, and have done quite a bit of work in that area. As a department we continue to monitor what is going on at AOSTRA. It's still a test facility, and I think we have fairly stringent requirements for the operation of that facility. But we haven't done any research particularly on the impacts of atmospheres related to tar sands recovery.

2:53

MR. TAYLOR: That leads into the last one, Mr. Chairman. We are concerned about the atmosphere and the air that the workers breathe in factories, whether it's dust in lumber mills or whether it's chemicals there or any pollution. Yet there seems to be a crack in our system through which our farmers and agricultural workers fall, that their atmosphere is being changed in many areas in this province because of industrial development and because of oil and gas treatment. The environmentalists are looking at what oil and gas and sulphur does to the land. We and your committee are looking at safety in the workplace and safe breathing and good health for the workers, yet somehow or another a farmer falls in between, and nobody's looking at it now. Therefore, have you considered putting some of your budget in that area, testing the atmosphere and the pollution that's in our rural areas and how they affect farm workers?

MR. TRYNCHY: We wouldn't be doing that, because that's an environmental concern.

MR. TAYLOR: That's my point. That's what I'm getting at. There's a crack there.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Have you responded, Mr. Minister?

MR. TRYNCHY: Well, we don't have the authority to do that. The air pollutants that leave a plant or wherever they are are under Environment. We have jurisdiction over health and safety in the workplace.

Now, you're talking about agriculture. It's a good question to raise when you have the estimates of Agriculture come up, because it's not a workplace. It's not designated under our jurisdiction as a workplace as it would be in an industry or a shop. So farming is not a workplace under our legislation.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.  
The Member for Stony Plain.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Recently I had occasion to meet with some sign erectors, representatives from a few companies. This was as a result of a tragic accident last spring. I was quite astounded at how unregulated the industry is. The question I would have is: do you have -- and this is perhaps a bit unfair, and I would wait for a written response on it -- the statistics on the number of accidents that are happening within the sign erection industry? I'm talking about the people who are putting up the neon signs and whatnot.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, that's not really applicable.

MR. WOLOSHYN: No, this is applicable. You don't have that, hon. minister, then? Because the next question I would have . . .

MR. TRYNCHY: No, we might have it under compensation, but I guess that's not what we're discussing here.

MR. WOLOSHYN: The next question I would have: in view of the fact that they seem to fall between the cracks of every jurisdiction going, has there been consideration given to looking at a type of safety program as per your heritage fund savings here that is directly applied towards the sign industry? They're not erectors; they're not electricians. They sort of hit and miss all over the place. Quite frankly, I wasn't aware of it until I met with the people. The question I have: is Occupational Health and Safety giving consideration to putting together some sort of training program that could be dispensed amongst the industry to help their workers at least be conscious of the problem?

MR. TRYNCHY: We can do that, but we couldn't do it under this program because we cannot access these funds ourselves. But we can do it as Occupational Health and Safety. We did a thorough investigation of that sign worker that was killed here, and that's available from Joe Miller.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, that question's more appropriate in the estimates. Do you have a final supplementary?

MR. WOLOSHYN: No.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.  
The Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MS MJOLSNESS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have just one question. I do appreciate the research that's done on behalf of workers in the province with the goal of preventing injuries, hopefully, as long as the initiatives that are taken aren't duplications of things that already have been done. But in terms of the substance use in the workplace, we see that there was a study done. It sounds like it was full of really good information, and it says that the goal after the study is done is "to help employers and workers develop appropriate policies and programs." I'm just wondering, with respect to this particular study with substance use in the workplace, if in fact policies or procedures have been developed. Has there been a follow-up to the study, or is that the mandate of this committee? I don't know.

MS LYNAS: There has been a follow-up. About 1,200 copies of that report have been circulated. Interestingly enough, we've had requests all over the world for that report. Within Alberta we have a joint committee between Alberta Occupational Health and Safety and AADAC and the members of the project steering committee,

who represent workers and employers, continuing to work on ways to get the message out.

We are aware that several other government departments and some agencies have found the report useful in terms of looking at the safety of their own workers and their own assistance programs that are available. We're also working with the construction industry where they want to look inside their own industry and develop suitable programs. A number of presentations of the results have been made, so there are these initiatives going on to make sure that the results are used.

MR. TRYNCHY: What the members of this Legislature can do, and I've done it considerably in past years, is take these reports -- they're available to you -- and send them to specific workplaces in your own constituency. And talk to the owners. Walk down the street and meet a few of them and say, "Look, have you done that?" The body shops, the garages, the farm implement dealerships. That's what you've got to do, because unless we all work together and get that message out . . . I recall years ago, when you got the document from somebody, you'd put it on the desk, and pretty soon it ended up in file 13 because you didn't have the time to read it. Small business sometimes doesn't have the time, so we've got to make an extra effort. You can help us by getting these documents out to your constituents. That certainly would be acceptable. Give us the number you require, and away we go. Sure. We all have a role to play here, you know. That's what we're elected for.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do you have a supplementary?

MS MJOLSNESS: Well, just to say that of course I would be pleased to deliver the studies. But what I'm talking about is follow-up to a study and implementing policies and developing programs. That seems to me a very important follow-up to any study that's done. But I appreciate the comments, knowing that some things are being done, that some initiatives are being taken as a follow-up to the study.

MR. TRYNCHY: If we have a study that needs changes to regulations, those changes are made. Yes, we do that.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Beverly.

MR. EWASIUK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to get my third question in. I wanted to make a comment regarding the certificate programs that are available for occupational health nurses. I noticed there are several. Grant MacEwan College, for example, received \$121,000 for granting a certificate for occupational nursing. I have no problem with that; I just wanted to comment on it. Perhaps the question I do have is: once someone like this receives a grant, like Grant MacEwan, and they've established a program for occupational health nurses, is that program in place then and they can continue to offer that program? Or do they have to come back to the government or to the grant committee and then ask for more money so they can do it again the following term? Is it established, and it stays within the school?

MR. TRYNCHY: No; we don't do it twice.

MS LYNAS: That program and other ones like it: the grant funds are used to develop the program, but then the institution takes it over. They take on the responsibility of delivering it and updating it.

3:03

MR. EWASIUK: Thank you very much. Also, if I may, Mr. Chairman. The back injuries. I appreciate that there are a lot of back injuries and a lot of work has been done to alleviate and determine how we can best deal with and prevent back injuries, but it occurs to me that while we may find a cure in one area for a back injury, we find another area that causes back injuries. I find in recent times, particularly with the advent of the computers and so on, that unless people that work at terminals are provided with proper work stations and proper chairs, you're going to find that many of those men and women are developing back and neck problems. So while we may have resolved an injury in an industrial area relative to back injury because we've taught everybody how to lift properly, we are now finding injuries in the office. I didn't see anything in here that maybe addresses that type of situation. Now, obviously your answer was: well, if somebody came to us, we'd certainly give them money to do it. Does your department, Mr. Minister, say to researchers out there somewhere: "Look, we need something done in a particular area. We will provide you with some funding, but we want you to do some research for us." Do you do that kind of thing?

MR. TRYNCHY: We do, yes. If we feel there is a need for a certain research program or a certain program, and the take-up isn't there by industry, we'll ask somebody to work with us and do it. Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have one question. I'm aware of a program in the Misericordia hospital called PARTY, which is an acronym for something about which I'm not explicitly certain. It is a program that is sponsored by the Misericordia hospital. They have in fact assigned a staff member to it. The program involves bringing in for day-long tours of the hospital interspersed with seminar presentations and films grade 9 students who get a glimpse of what can happen largely with drinking and driving and drug related concerns. I'm wondering whether the minister is aware of that program, and if so, whether he has had occasion to review it and study it and see whether it might have application elsewhere in the province.

MR. TRYNCHY: I'm not aware of the PARTY program. I know the Heroes program, and I know the Window of Opportunity, but this is something new. I've never been notified of the PARTY program, but if there's a need for myself to be knowledgeable on it, I will be. I just wondered if anybody here on my staff would know anything about it.

MR. LYONS: No, I wasn't aware of it, but we can find out about it.

MR. TRYNCHY: It's at the Misericordia?

MR. MITCHELL: It's at the Misericordia hospital.

MR. TRYNCHY: Well, we'll ask the question and see how we can fit in if we can.

MR. MITCHELL: Sure. Great. Thanks.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

That concludes the list of questions that I have from the committee today. We appreciate the minister and his department



people coming before the committee and the frankness with which they've answered the questions.

The committee will next convene on October 20 at 10 a.m., when Mr. Donald Salmon, the Auditor General, will appear before the committee. The Chair would entertain a motion for adjournment from the Member for Lloydminster, who so moves. All those in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you. The meeting stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 3:08 p.m.]

