



341 Years on the Tools

A Study on Barriers Injured Veteran Electricians Face When Retrained by WSIB for New Careers as Electrical Estimator or Inspector

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In August 2014 the membership and union leadership were alerted to an emerging problem that injured workers are having with WSIB. Many Injured electricians are being pigeon holed into new careers as *Electrical Estimator* or *Electrical Inspector* because WSIB believes this is a quick easy transition, often times with little retraining except for a code book refresher course for Inspectors. The nub of the problem rests with Work Transition Specialists who do not understand the real world our members inhabit, and instead are heavily influenced by NOC codes (National Occupational Classification) that WSIB uses to determine Suitable Occupations. NOC codes are a Dictionary of Occupational Titles and at best a thumb nail sketch of various jobs. The NOC codes are devoid of any intelligible information regarding real-world skill sets, training and experience that are required, but they do list a Certificate of Qualification (C of Q) in a licensed trade as a gate-way skill.

Local 353 commissioned a study to investigate the WSIB return to work program, and found the current system appears to fail when it comes to offering viable career alternatives for injured veteran electricians. The study, authored by Gavan Howe, looks at occupational injustice through the lens of occupational identity in the distinct social community of electricians, and the difficulties experienced by trades people making career changes.

Due to unique personal, social, and organizational factors involved, veteran electricians who suffer debilitating occupational injuries or illness face significant barriers to getting hired into alternative occupations, specifically two occupations WSIB suggests they qualify for: *Electrical Estimator* and *Inspector*. This study investigated how is it that expert, veteran electricians who can longer be an electrician due to illness or injury remain unemployed or underemployed, sometimes for as much as seven years post-injury?

The study was aimed at finding out about the transition an injured electrician goes through when moving from work with their hands to work with their minds. This involved a review of 19 electrical workers who have been injured and are attempting or have succeeded in making the transition to an inspector or electrical estimator.

On Transition to Electrical Estimator Role

All study participants, save two, noted the extreme difficulty they faced in finding gainful employment as an estimator. It takes six things: attitude, skills, experience, flexibility, constant retraining, early experience with computers and office work. If any were

offered a junior estimating position, the pay was noted as being \$15 an hour, not \$40 per hour they were paid as electricians.

The majority of junior electrical estimator positions posted on various web sites ask for at least three years of experience in addition to other skills in order to be considered as a junior estimator. One of the key barriers for veteran electricians becoming employed as a junior estimator is the standard requirement for three years of experience as an electrical estimator. For a 50-year-old electrician who has never worked in the office, how likely is it they will be hired in order to secure the required three years of prior estimating experience?

NOC 2234 [Estimator] makes no mention of the fact that this is a time sensitive role or the significant and proven computer skills required. Estimated bids must be comprehensive, accurate, detailed, and delivered on time. An bid error can have a serious financial impact on a company, which is why young men and women hired today as junior estimators have advanced computer skills, enjoy office work, and can work well with deadlines. Veteran electricians face questions related to age, health, and computer skills and proficiency, as well as the required three years' experience and on-the-job training required to be considered for a junior estimator role.

On Transition to an Inspector Role

Contrary to the WSIBs perception that the single most important skill to becoming an inspector is a C of Q, the reality is quite different. For veteran electricians who have never been stewards, health & safety representatives, or dealt with Ministry of Labour stop work orders and enforcement issues, there are varied requirements in order to perform the tactical and strategic work of inspector. Skills and experience the typical electrician would not possess.

Critically important, but missing in the WSIB transferrable skill analysis, is the need for inspectors to be well versed and current on a wide range of legal, law enforcement, regulations, and guidelines that play a significant role in an inspectors daily workload, so too when considering new recruits. The need for strong communication skills, and a wide range of knowledge of many different types of electrical construction, installation, and repair are also required, as are strong interpersonal and management skills.

Veteran electricians who have transitioned to inspector are highly skilled, experienced, and have managerial experience to be able to deal in a dynamically complex world inspecting job sites, issuing work orders, and stop work orders, while dealing with difficult situations.



In reality, many veteran electricians lack the most important skills and experience to become an inspector, considering the WSIB discounts or fails to consider, because they do not understand the electrical industry, our members, and believe the inspector job is a seamless transition for veteran injured electricians.

A glaring problem is NOC 2264 [Inspector] because it makes no mention of the 309A or 309D license required for this role, nor do WSIB Work Transition Specialists understand the distinction between different licenses, different trade sectors or work experience that members have. The WSIB considers all electricians to be the same. Nor does the inspector NOC mention the wide range of transferrable skills required, such as electrical contracting experience and knowledge of all types of electrical installations. Further, there is no mention of computer, communications, management, interviewing, report writing, relationship building, negotiations, dispute resolution, training, occupational and safety, or risk education and awareness, along with soft and hard skills to be an inspector.

For a veteran injured electrician to become an inspector, is like winning a lottery.

341 Years on the Tools will be used to support member appeals who have been denied adequate retraining and suffered loss of earnings benefits. On the political front, our study will inform the WSIB and Members of Ontario Legislature of the glaring problems with the WSIBs retraining of veteran injured electricians.

Finally, as the 353 workers compensation representative, I have a responsibility and duty to champion this issue. As an Executive Board member, I believe we need an industry solution, and that means the IBEW and the Electrical Contractors should investigate ways and means to return veteran injured electricians back into the field, in some capacity, instead of throwing valuable workers on the scrap heap.

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Victoria Day

The Statutory Holiday will be observed on Monday, May 18, 2015. If your employer asks you to work on this day, you must be paid double time for working on this holiday!

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IBEW 353 South Union Hall, 1377 Lawrence Ave East, Toronto, 9:00 am to 11:30 am



TEIBAS
 Toronto **Electrical**
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SATURDAY, MAY 23, 2015

RETIREE INFORMATION SEMINAR: designed for retired members or their survivors, to learn about their benefit coverage with IBEW Local 353.

OCTOBER 17, 2015

RETIREE INFORMATION SEMINAR: designed for retired members or their survivors, to learn about their benefit coverage with IBEW Local 353.

NOVEMBER 7, 2015

BENEFIT INFORMATION SEMINAR: designed for active members to learn about their benefit coverage under the IBEW Local 353 Group Benefit Plan.

NOVEMBER 21, 2015

PRE-RETIREMENT SEMINAR: designed for active members who are looking to retire within the next six months and require information on pension options, benefit coverage changes and life insurance entitlements.

Please register by calling TEIBAS at 416-637-6789 or by email: members@teibas.com.

Spouses are welcome to attend. Seating is limited.