

Too high a price

Ed Kuderer spent 32 years installing carpet, linoleum, tile and parquet floors in the Cincinnati area. All the lifting and pushing battered his right shoulder, lower back, neck and right arm, to the extent that he is permanently disabled.

"The pain comes and goes," he said. "A lot of times, if I'm standing in one spot, my feet will go numb. I have a lot of pain in my lower back. It runs down the back of my legs."

Such musculoskeletal injuries are the bane of carpet- and floor-installers. They move furniture and rolls of carpet weighing up to 800 pounds apiece. They work in awkward positions. They kneel for hours at a time.

"I've seen one guy with a knee the size of a softball," Kuderer said. "It's the nature of the trade. Some people get hurt, and some people don't."

Still, he believes workers could be spared at least some of the discomfort he's experienced.

"I think sometimes the employer could put two or three men on a job instead of one man, who has all the burden," Kuderer said. "They won't give you enough help when you need it."

Kuderer's succession of ergonomic injuries started in 1977. He managed to work until 1991, but his last few years were agonizing.

"At the end of the day," he said, "it was all I could do to get to my car."

Kuderer must spend three to four hours a day stretching, walking and doing other exercises to keep limber. "I can't stand too long in one spot, and I can't sit too long," he said. "I'm better off if I keep moving."

He's restless and dispirited. He wishes he could still work in his chosen trade, but the fact is that even the most mundane household task can send him to bed.

"I tried pulling weeds a couple of weeks ago, and it put me down for two days," Kuderer said. "It's frustrating. I never minded hard work."