

## The Supreme Court of Canada is Now Ergonomically Correct

Thanks to the expertise of ErgoPrime

**ErgoPrime has been a key contributor in making Canada's Supreme Court Justices comfortable and more productive.**

The Ottawa Citizen (January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2003) reported, "Canada's high seat of justice is now ergonomically correct". Previously, their high-backed red leather courtroom chairs, which project the justices' power and authority, used to punish them with back discomfort.

"You have to give them great credit that no one ever had to get wheeled away in a stretcher from falling out of one of these chairs in great pain," says Jim Hay, of the Canadian Conservation Institute. The chairs were too deep, too wide, and unstable to properly support the justices in the courtroom. Eventually Canada's top judges leaned on an ObusForme back insert for support, but this did not resolve the injustice the judges were suffering.

A team of experts was brought in: an ergonomics expert from ErgoPrime Inc., heritage conservation specialists from Public Works and Government Services; and an industrial designer. The team's challenge was to fix the chair's ergonomic deficiencies without compromising the design integrity of some of Canada's finest heritage furniture.

The seat pans were far too deep, 22 inches, for the justices to receive any support for their backs. Their back muscles were under strain for hours while the court was in session. Eight of nine justices suffered back pain.

The armrests caused postural indignities. The armrests were too low forcing the justices to slump over to one side for support. They were too long to fit under the desk, causing the justices to hunch forward to write on the bench.

The chair's original wooden legs had been replaced with a five-legged caster base and a reclining mechanism in a vain attempt to make the chairs more comfortable. Over time the mechanisms wore and now recline with a distinct clunk. "Once you got them moving, you were almost out of control," says Mr. Hay. "When they'd lean over to talk to the next person, it (the

chair) would reach a certain point and then it would kind of go over ... and there'd be hands reaching out to steady themselves."

The material that covered the chair acted like wax on a slide, causing the justices to almost slide out of the chair while wearing their silky gowns.

The chairs weighed over a 100 pounds, making them very difficult to move despite the casters. The armrests wore the battle scars from colliding with the bench during repeated attempts to maneuver the chairs close enough to the desk to write.

"The chairs convey a message of the power and authority of the judges" says Pam Grills, the ergonomics consultant from ErgoPrime Inc., called in to resolve the ergonomic flaws. "Once they were seated you could see that the smaller judges – they range in height from under five feet to six feet tall-- had to perch up on the front edge of the chairs like birds and make several attempts to pull themselves into the bench because the chairs are very heavy. So right away, it diminishes the ambiance of the power and authority to see them struggling."

Exiting the court was a comedy of errors, "only one chair could be swiveled at a time to let one person out so, inevitably, two people would try to turn at the same time and they'd get locked and you'd end up with all this jostling going on."

After an in-depth analysis and consultations with the justices, ErgoPrime came up with a plan



Ergonomics expert Pam Grills, ErgoPrime Inc., was a key player in restoring our Supreme Court Justices to a position of comfortable authority.

to refresh the chairs. Replacing the chairs and preserving the old ones in a museum would be much more expensive. The chairs were restored to their original four-leg design; the armrest padding was thickened by two inches, new form fitting foam was installed in the seat pans, and custom made back supports of various thickness were provided to each justice. The chairs were finished off with a new high quality red leather to prevent the justices from sliding out of their seats.

The transformation of the courtroom was not complete yet. The surface of the walnut bench was extended four inches so the chair arms could fit under the bench, and the justices could sit upright in comfort while writing. Finger grips

were molded into the bench extension so the justices could easily pull themselves into position on the new low friction carpeting.

The proposed design changes to the chairs and bench were mocked-up and the judges evaluated them with a critical eye. All the justices ruled in favour of the new chairs and bench. “The justices are now comfortable and thankful”, says Supreme Court Registrar Anne Roland.

**Ms. Grills summarizes: "The solutions ErgoPrime has come up with will make the justices much more comfortable and productive. They'll be able to concentrate on the cases and not be thinking 'my back's uncomfortable, when does this session end?'"**

**If ErgoPrime delivers these kinds of results for the Supreme Court imagine what we will do for your supreme assets... your employees!**

**Why wait? Call us today to tap into our expertise – (613) 721-9220.**