

Information



WHY WE NEED A DAY OF MOURNING

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act came into effect in October 1979, the following deaths and injuries have occurred in Ontario workplaces according to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (previously the Workers' Compensation Board).

YEAR	DEATHS	TOTAL CLAIMS	TOTAL LOST-TIME CLAIMS
1980	325	444,674	165,221
1981	292	415,044	163,366
1982	244	349,747	148,713
1983	256	344,758	147,666
1984	262	388,845	172,002
1985	213	426,880	188,461
1986	225	442,080	203,241
1987	258	469,681	209,255
1988*	332	489,819	215,184
1989	307	474,543	208,324
1990	269	479,731	191,345
1991	332	418,590	160,499
1992	275	382,426	141,364
1993†	292	373,050	129,930
1994	247	374,243	129,773
1995	262	376,185	122,577
1996	245	348,999	108,227
1997	234	344,142	105,588
1998	276	345,831	100,742
1999	292	367,399	105,784
2000	313	382,518	108,028
2001	303	374,826	103,476
2002	359	365,469	99,205
2003	349	359,353	97,127
2004	328	357,116	89,411

At the time this information was prepared there were still 76 fatality claims from 2002, 35 from 2003 and 123 from 2004 waiting for a decision from the WSIB. It may take several years for all claims filed to be resolved. The majority of the claims pending are for occupational disease which now accounts for over 60% of the allowed fatal claims.



These fatality figures do not reflect the true toll taken by occupational diseases, estimated to be as high as 6,000 Ontario workers every year by a study entitled "Occupational Disease and Workers' Compensation" prepared by Dr. Annalee Yassi for Paul Weiler's inquiry into the Ontario compensation system.

Occupational cancer makes up a significant portion of occupational disease. Those researchers acting as consultants to industry argue occupation is an insignificant risk factor and occupational cancer is just 5% of all cancers. Others, not so closely connected to industry, estimate from 9% to 40% of all cancers are occupational. In Ontario, this means that between 2,200 and 9,800 workers die of cancer each year as a result of their exposures at work.

In addition to the human suffering, the health care costs of these cancers range from 130 million dollars to 500 million dollars. Most of this money would be reimbursed to the Ontario health care system by the WSIB if the occupational cancers were recognized. Few workers make the connection between their ill health and exposures they have had over the years. Just 384 fatal occupational disease claims were made to the WSIB in 2004.

In 1988, a resolution introduced into the Ontario legislature by the Ontario NDP, passed unanimously recognizing April 28 as a Provincial Day of Mourning.

And in 1991 Bill C-223, An Act Respecting a Day of Mourning for Persons Killed or Injured in the Workplace, a Private Member's Bill sponsored by brother Rod Murphy, NDP M.P., passed through all stages of the House of Commons and Senate. The bill, which now proclaims April 28 of each year as a National Day of Mourning, received royal assent on February 1, 1991 and is now law.

The AFL-CIO in the United States and our trade union brothers and sisters in Australia have introduced the Day of Mourning in their countries as well. In 1998, Spain adopted the date as the National Day of Workplace Health and Safety. According to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), commemoration activities are held in over 70 countries.

April 28th allows all Canadians and people throughout the world to pay respect to those working people who have died or suffered injuries and diseases on the job. While we mourn the dead, labour and all people must dedicate themselves to fight for the living and prevent this terrible and unnecessary toll.

* plus 69 **

** The total deaths include 69 miners who died of lung cancer and were recognized in 1988, but did not necessarily die that year.

† In May of 1993, the Workers' Compensation Board changed the method used to report fatalities. Previously, fatalities were reported based on when the claim was allowed by the Board regardless of the year in which the claim was registered. The new method reports only those fatality claims registered and allowed in the same year. The 1993 fatality figure listed here reflects the total fatalities based on the previous method of reporting. The fatalities after 1993 are being tabulated by the OFL based on the new method of reporting.

March 2005