

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	314	382,518	108,142
2001	304	374,826	103,858
2002	366	365,469	99,729
2003	361	359,353	98,139
2004	386	357,116	94,571
2005	367	357,555	92,768
2006	315	341,437	82,472

At the time this information was prepared there were still 39 fatality claims from 2005, and 103 from 2006 waiting for a decision from the WSIB. It may take several years for all claims filed to be resolved. The overwhelming majority of the claims pending are for occupational disease.

These fatality figures still 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.

The health care costs of these work related illnesses are in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Much of this money would be reimbursed to the Ontario health care system by the WSIB but few workers make the connection between their ill health and exposures they have had over the years. Just 365 fatal occupational disease claims were made to the WSIB in 2006.

Currently 40% of the lost-time injuries allowed by the WSIB are for musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) resulting from poor ergonomic controls in the workplace. A recent report prepared by labour and employer representatives estimated the direct and indirect cost of these injuries to be \$12 billion and suggested that the magnitude of this problem threatens the safety of workers and the economic performance of Ontario as well.

Much of this human suffering and economic harm could be averted if the government would shift its approach to workplace hazards by adopting the very first recommendation from the recently released final report of the SARS Commission. That recommendation reads as follows:

“That the precautionary principle, which states that action to reduce risk need not await scientific certainty, be expressly adopted as a guiding principle throughout Ontario’s health, public health and worker safety systems by way of policy statement, by explicit reference in all relevant operational standards and directions, and by way of inclusion, through preamble, statement of principle, or otherwise, in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*, and all relevant health statutes and regulations.”

In 1988 an NDP resolution introduced into the Ontario legislature passed unanimously recognizing April 28 as a Provincial Day of Mourning. In 1991 a Private Member's Bill, sponsored by the NDP, was passed which now proclaims April 28 of each year as a National Day of Mourning. According to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), commemoration activities are now held in nearly 100 countries. The Day of Mourning is now truly a Global event.

April 28 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.