



April 28 National Day of Mourning

Every year thousands of people gather around the world on April 28th to observe the National Day of Mourning.

The purpose of Day of Mourning is twofold – to remember and honour those lives lost or injured because of their work, and, to renew the commitment to prevent further deaths, injuries and diseases by improving health and safety in the workplace.

April 28th is observed in many different ways around the world.

Many labour organizations, unions, families, communities and government agencies coordinate public events that include speeches, a moment of silence, laying wreaths and flowers, lighting candles, planting trees, unveiling monuments, releasing balloons, and laying out empty shoes or hard hats to symbolize those who have died at work.

Some events involve active campaigning on relevant issues, public demonstrations or workplace or public awareness sessions that provide information regarding occupational health and safety.

Individuals don ribbons, black armbands, bracelets, or stickers to show their support. Workers on the water, in trains or in transport trucks will often blow their whistle or horn at 11:00 am in honour of the day.

The Canadian flag on Parliament Hill is typically flown at half-mast, as it is in many other communities.

Did you know?

The Canary in the Cage is an internationally recognized symbol for workers' health and safety.

In the 19th century, coal mines did not have ventilation systems and so coal miners used canaries to warn them of hazardous air quality. Canaries are more sensitive to airborne hazards, such as methane and carbon dioxide, than humans.

As long as the canary kept singing, the miners knew their air supply was safe – a dead canary signaled an immediate evacuation.

It goes without saying that this was a very inadequate form of health and safety protection for miners – many miners died in these poor conditions.

Many labour organizations have adopted some form of the Canary in the Cage to symbolize the Day of Mourning.

THE FACTS

British Columbia

As reported to the Workers Compensation Board as of March 15, 2013, in 2012:

- 181 workers died.
- Four were young workers.
- More than 100 died due to occupational disease.

Canada

According to the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada, nationally:

- Every year, approximately 1,000 workers die.
- Every day, nearly three workers die.
- Every year, workers suffer from 250,000 work-related injuries/diseases.
- Every day, workers suffer from 685 work-related injuries/diseases.

Around the world every 15 seconds . . .

- One worker dies
- 151 work-related injuries are reported
- 76 non-fatal occupational diseases are reported

Internationally

More people die each year because of work than fighting in wars.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), across the world:

- Every year, more than 2.3 million workers die¹.
- Every day, 6,300 workers die.
- Every year, workers suffer from 317 million work-related injuries.
- Every day, workers suffer from 870,000 work-related injuries.
- Every year, workers suffer from 160 million non-fatal occupational diseases.
- Every day, workers suffer from 440,000 non-fatal occupational diseases.

¹ Of these fatalities, reportedly 2.02 million workers died as a result of occupational disease.

THE HISTORY

The Day of Mourning has a very proud Canadian labour history. At the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) convention in 1984, a resolution was submitted by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) National Health and Safety Committee recommending the creation of a remembrance day for workers killed or injured on the job. This resolution was readily adopted by the convention delegates. The date April 28th was chosen because on April 28 in 1914, the first comprehensive workers compensation act was passed in the legislature.

The CLC officially declared and recognized the National Day of Mourning on April 28, 1985. In Canada, over 25,000 workers have died due to work-related injuries or diseases since 1985.

In December 1990, following years of lobbying efforts by Canadian unions and the NDP, the federal government passed Bill C-223, the Workers Mourning Day Act, making April 28, 1991 the first government recognized National Day of Mourning. The Act is a brief piece of legislation, which reads, in part:

“Throughout Canada, in each and every year, the 28th day of April shall be known under the name of Day of Mourning for Persons Killed or Injured in the Workplace.”

This movement quickly spread outside of Canada. In the United States in 1989, the American Federation of Labour began to recognize April 28th as Workers’ Memorial Day.

The United Kingdom (UK) began their campaign to recognize this day in 1992. Workers’ Memorial Day was adopted by the Scottish Trade Union Congress (TUC) in 1993, the UK TUC in 1999 and the UK Health and Safety Commission in 2000.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International TUC (ITUC) declared the International Day of Mourning in 1996. Let us carry on the international cry to:

“MOURN for the Dead and FIGHT for the Living!”

Did you know?

*In 2001, the ILO declared April 28th **World Day for Safety and Health at Work** and in 2002 announced that it should be an official day in the United Nations system.*

Today, the Day of Mourning is observed in about 100 countries, including: Argentina, Belgium, Bermuda, Brazil, Canada, Dominican Republic, Gibraltar, Luxembourg, Panama, Peru, Portugal, Spain, Thailand, Taiwan, United States and the United Kingdom. Trade Unions in other countries including Benin, Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Malta, Nepal, New Zealand, Romania and Singapore are pursuing government recognition.

*What began in Canada nearly 30 years ago can now truly be called the **International Day of Mourning**.*