April 28, 2016 |

Statements

National Day of Mourning – a call to action for a comprehensive ban on asbestos

Vancouver – The following is a statement from Irene Lanzinger, President of the BC Federation of Labour, marking the National Day of Mourning:

“Every year communities across the country hold ceremonies to mark the National Day of Mourning on April 28.

It is a day we remember all those who have lost their lives, been injured or become ill because of their work. It is a day to honour the families, friends and co-workers who are left behind when a worker dies, or who must care for their family members who have been seriously injured or sick.

It is also a day to renew our commitment to fight for healthier and safer workplaces; for greater accountability of negligent employers; and for full compensation for injured workers and survivors.

On this Day of Mourning, the BC Federation of Labour, along with the Canadian Labour Congress, provincial Federations of Labour, and unions across Canada are making a call to action for a comprehensive ban on asbestos – the hidden killer.

Asbestos is the leading cause of work-related death in British Columbia and Canada.

It is estimated that every year more than 145,000 Canadian workers are exposed to asbestos at their workplaces, and tragically over 2,000 are diagnosed with fatal asbestos-related cancers and other diseases.

We must eliminate workers' exposure to asbestos and put an end to these preventable deaths.

In BC, hundreds of workers are exposed to asbestos during demolition, renovation and excavation activities as a result of unidentified asbestos containing materials or poor asbestos abatement practices.

That is why this year the BC Federation of Labour is urging the provincial government to institute mandatory licensing of asbestos abatement contractors and provincially recognized certification of asbestos abatement workers. In addition, we urge all municipalities to require hazardous materials inspection reports and confirmation that any abatement work was performed by a licenced contractor prior to the issuance of a permit for demolition, renovation or excavation.

Last year in British Columbia 187 workers lost their lives in a work-related tragedy. That is 187 families mourning the loss of a loved one. Thousands more were injured or developed occupational diseases.

This is simply unacceptable. An injury to one is an injury to all.

We all need to do better. The government, the Workers' Compensation Board, and employers need to do more – and need to be held accountable. Implementing a ban on asbestos is one concrete step governments can take that will save lives."

The National Day of Mourning is recognized in over 100 countries. It began with a resolution passed in 1984 by the Canadian Labour Congress, and was officially adopted by the federal government in 1991.

his year the Day of Mourning BC School Project will be launched in 120 high schools across the province. This project is a partnership between the BC Labour Heritage Centre, the Workers Compensation Board, the BC Teachers' Federation, and the BC Federation of Labour.

The BC Federation of Labour encourages everyone to attend a Day of Mourning ceremony in your community, fly your flags at half-mast, and observe a minute of silence at 11:00 am on April 28, 2016.

For a full list of Day of Mourning events, please visit http://bcfed-d7.ddev.site/events/april-28-national-day-mourning