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Releases

Day of Mourning remembers fallen workers on April 28

On National Day of Mourning, workers, families, employers and others come together to commemorate workers who have lost their lives due to a workplace injury or disease. The day marks an opportunity to renew our collective commitment to protecting the health, safety and well-being of all workers.

Workplace injuries and illnesses claimed the lives of 151 workers in BC in 2020, with more than half (88) of the work-related deaths resulting from occupational disease—37 of those were the result of exposures to asbestos decades earlier. Occupational disease related to asbestos exposure remains the leading cause of all workplace-related fatalities.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, public ceremonies will be virtual again in 2021. A commemorative video and moment of silence will take place at 10:30 am to remember those 151 BC workers who died from a workplace injury or illness. The ceremony will include messages from Minister of Labour Harry Bains, WorkSafeBC, the BC Federation of Labour, the Business Council of British Columbia, and the Vancouver and District Labour Council. Avneet Sidhu will also share a message in memory of her mother, Sarbjit Kaur Sidhu, who died when a van carrying farmworkers crashed in March 2007. The virtual ceremony can be observed online at www.dayofmourning.bc.ca.

In its sixth year, many students across BC took part in the Day of Mourning BC Schools Project and participated remotely in a series of activities to learn about their rights in the workplace. Often, young workers are the most vulnerable group in the workforce and are statistically more likely to suffer injury or death at the workplace. In BC, an average of 27 young workers experience time-loss injuries each day.

The Canadian Labour Congress held the first National Day of Mourning ceremony in 1985, making Canada the first country to formally commemorate workers killed in the workplace. In 1991, the federal government passed the Workers Mourning Act, and the following year, British Columbia proclaimed April 28 as the Day of Mourning. Today, it is recognized in 100 countries around the world.

Quotes:

Harry Bains, Minister of Labour:
“Today, we remember the people who died because of their workplace injuries, accidents and illnesses. We think of the families, friends, and coworkers they have left behind. The National Day of Mourning is an important opportunity to restate our commitment to making BC workplaces the safest in Canada. Every day we are taking action to improve workplace safety so that every worker returns home in the same condition they left.”

Laird Cronk, President, BC Federation of Labour:
“The National Day of Mourning is a day for sombre reflection. But it must also be a collective call to action. In 2020, 173 workers died because of their jobs. Our province can never accept the deaths of nearly four workers every week. Now, amid a pandemic that puts workers throughout BC at risk, it's more important than ever to protect working people.”

Greg D’Avignon, President and CEO, Business Council of British Columbia:
“Today we pause to honour those that lost their lives or were injured at work this year. We must also pledge everyday as business, labour, government, and workers to act on our shared responsibility to ensure safe workplaces and a culture of safety to prevent even one death or one injury in the

workplace going forward. We must stand together to prevent these avoidable tragedies in the future."

Anne Naser, President and CEO, WorkSafeBC:
"The Day of Mourning is a powerful reminder that health and safety must be a priority every single day of the year. As we continue to navigate the global COVID-19 pandemic, we have all seen how critical workplace health and safety is. By working together we can make a difference in the lives of British Columbians. We can prevent injury, disease and death in the workplace — every worker has the right to go home safely at the end of the day."

Stephen von Sychowski, President of the Vancouver & District Labour Council:
"The National Day of Mourning is a time to remember all of those who have been lost to workplace incidents and illnesses in British Columbia and beyond. It is also a time to renew our fight for the living, our work to ensure that every worker goes home safe at the end of their shift. As we continue through the COVID-19 pandemic, many workers face an added dimension of risk which we must all commit to do all we can to mitigate. One workplace death is too many, but the Day of Mourning is a reminder to us all to know and exercise our rights, live up to our responsibilities, and contribute to supporting the education, regulation, and enforcement that is needed to keep all workers safe."

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See attached fact sheet, and for more information: www.dayofmourning.bc.ca

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