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Releases

Ceremonies across BC honour lost workers on April 28

Richmond — This weekend, thousands of British Columbians are remembering workers who lost their lives on the job, at more than 35 Day of Mourning ceremonies around the province.

Today's Vancouver ceremony begins at 10:30 a.m. at Jack Poole Plaza, preceded by the lighting of the Olympic Cauldron at 10 a.m. Among those speaking in Vancouver are Sadaf Abdul, who will tell her father's tragic story, and Mike Shaw, who will talk about his life-changing injury on the job.

Presentations from the Ministry of Labour, the BC Federation of Labour, Business Council of British Columbia (BCBC), and WorkSafeBC will honour lost workers. The ceremony, emceed by the Vancouver & District Labour Council, will conclude with a moment of silence, followed by a piper-led honour-guard procession and the placing of roses as a symbol of remembrance.

In 2018, WorkSafeBC accepted 131 work-related death claims, 66 as a result of occupational disease and 65 from traumatic injury, including 24 claims involving motor-vehicle incidents. The highest numbers of work-related deaths by industry subsector were in general construction (30), transportation and related services (20), and public administration (14).

This marks the 22nd year BCFED, the BCBC, and WorkSafeBC have jointly hosted a public commemorative ceremony for the Day of Mourning in Vancouver.

Last week, hundreds of students at more than 180 schools took part in the *Day of Mourning: BC Schools project*. Now in its fourth year, the BC Labour Heritage Centre program honours fallen workers by educating students about workplace safety. In 2018, four young workers died of occupational injuries.

Quotes from today's speakers:

Sadaf Abdul, daughter of a fatally injured worker:
"After my dad's fall, they let us see him in the ICU. I held his hand and I prayed and prayed. My father, my best friend, was leaving me and I had to say goodbye to him, goodbye forever.

"After I heard what had happened, I knew it was preventable. There are steps — small, simple steps — that employers and workers can take to save lives."

Laird Cronk, President of the BC Federation of Labour:
"On April 28 every year, we commemorate the workers who have been killed, injured, or become ill because of their work. In 2018, 187 workers did not return home or passed from work-related illnesses. That's nearly four workers every week.

"The National Day of Mourning is a day for sombre reflection, but also a collective call to action. We must do more to protect workers in BC."

Minister of Labour Harry Bains:
"Today we mourn those who have lost their lives, send thoughts to people injured on the job, and vow to do more to protect today's workers from injury or illness. The National Day of Mourning highlights the need for all of us to make workplace safety our priority, and today, I am proud to stand up and re-affirm my commitment to safe workplaces through action.

"We are making changes to the Labour Relations Code, the Employment Standards Branch, and the workers' compensation system to provide better supports for working British Columbians. Without exception, I want all workplaces in British Columbia to have strong cultures of safety."

Greg D’Avignon, President and CEO, Business Council of British Columbia

“Each day 2.5 million British Columbians go to work. Despite the diversity of the jobs we perform, we are united in our commitment to safe workplaces and operating practices. Today, we mourn the individuals who have needlessly died or were injured while at work. To truly honour these people, we all must rededicate ourselves to our collective responsibility to end preventable workplace accidents and injuries.”

Brian Erickson, WorkSafeBC interim President and CEO:

“The Day of Mourning gives added meaning and urgency to the need for safer, healthier workplaces. Health and safety must be our priority every day of the year. Workplace injury and work-related disease are preventable; they are not a cost of doing business.”

Stephen von Sychowski, President of the Vancouver & District Labour Council

"The Day of Mourning is one of the most important dates annually. It's a critical reminder of the importance of our workplaces having robust enforcement of regulations, ensuring consistent employer adherence to responsibilities, and that workers know their rights and exercise them. One workplace death is too many, and it takes us all to make that a reality."