



Canadian Labour Congress
Congrès du travail du Canada

National Day of Mourning

For workers killed and injured on the job

ACTION ✓ CHECKLIST

For local unions & labour councils

**CONTAINS IMPORTANT
INFORMATION AND STATISTICS**

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING for workers killed and injured on the job

BACKGROUND ON THE CLC NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

For some years, Canadian unions had been observing an annual day of remembrance for workers killed and injured on the job.

The CLC Executive Council formalized this trend in 1984 and designated April 28 as the National Day of Mourning.

April 28 was chosen as it was the day of the third reading of the first comprehensive Workers' Compensation Act in Canada (Ontario, 1914).

Since 1984, observances of the Day of Mourning have become very widespread in Canada, led by unions and labour councils, but often with the participation of municipalities, social action groups, and other non-government organizations.

In the U.S., the AFL-CIO has adopted April 28 as Workers' Memorial Day.

April 28 is now officially recognized by Parliament in Bill C-223, an *Act Respecting a Day of Mourning for Persons Killed or Injured in the Workplace* (short title; *Workers' Mourning Day Act*), which became law on February 1, 1991.

The aim of the Day of Mourning is to "**fight for the living**" as well as "**mourn for the dead.**"

Nearly 100 countries worldwide observe a day of mourning, making it a truly Global event. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) holds observances at the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development in New York.

WHY A THEME?

The CLC Health and Safety Committee recommends that we highlight a different health and safety issue each year. This will enable the labour movement a further opportunity to inform the general public and the press about health and safety concerns that effect workers.

ACTION CHECKLIST FOR LOCAL UNIONS AND LABOUR COUNCILS

- ✓ Prepare for the event well in advance so it is:
 - well-organized
 - well-attended
 - well-publicized

- ✓ Organization:
 - form a working committee of the labour council to organize and publicize the event;
 - inform the local police of your plans (time, place, and likely attendance);
 - consider holding the event at lunch time to help ensure good attendance.

- ✓ Approach your municipal (and/or provincial) government and ask them to co-sponsor the event with the local union movement and to fly all flags on government buildings at half-mast.

- ✓ Invite sympathetic community organizations to participate, for example:
 - injured workers' groups;
 - labour participation committees of the United Way;
 - community health organizations;
 - religious groups; it is important to have religious leaders talk about the workplace carnage during their religious gatherings;
 - universities and colleges, e.g., health and safety class members;
 - other public interest organizations active in the area, e.g., environmental groups;
 - invite students of all ages to attend through the school boards, principals, and teachers.

- ✓ Alert all the local media beforehand — write to them about the event and theme and follow up with a phone call:
 - radio stations
 - T.V. stations
 - daily papers
 - free press and weeklies
 - radio and T.V. talk shows

- ✓ Build and dedicate a workers' monument in the community:
 - conduct a fund-raising event;
 - attempt to find a donated location in a prominent place in the community;
 - hold your annual event at the monument.

- ✓ Hold a publicity campaign in the locality with small ads and posters in:
 - public buildings
 - hospitals and clinics
 - schools and colleges
 - union newsletters
 - local newspapers
 - churches

- ✓ Keep the event fairly short but interesting; hold it in a central or symbolic place, e.g., outside the Town Hall, in a public place near a hospital, near the site of a major workplace accident or a commemorative site.

- ✓ Try to provide a platform or microphone and use union buttons, banners, flags, and posters. Try to get an appropriate band, musician or singer to begin and conclude the proceedings and hold a minute's silence as part of the program. Consider holding a parade leading up to the "static event" if attendance is likely to be high.

- ✓ It is important to provide speakers who have **something to say**, whether or not they are dynamic, for example:
 - spouse of a deceased worker
 - a disabled worker
 - an uncompensated widow/widower (make sure they are credible!)
 - someone with a good track record in workplace or community health

WORKPLACE OBSERVATIONS OF THE NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

The aim of the Canadian Labour Congress is to get **universal, official recognition** of the Day at all levels of government — municipal, provincial/territorial, and federal.

In addition, several local unions have taken the initiatives to get recognition of the Day in workplaces. Ideas include:

- ✓ contract clauses, laying down the duties of the employer and the rights of workers in connection with the Day;
- ✓ dealing with the Day in workplace health and safety training programs;
- ✓ lowering flags to half-mast at the work site on the Day;
- ✓ a minute's silence at 11:00 a.m.;
- ✓ special education sessions scheduled on the Day;
- ✓ award presentations to workers and others who have made a special contribution to control the hazards "at the source."

Note: Special workplace inspections on the Day are not recommended, since they could disrupt hard-won rights to regular, scheduled inspections by the joint health and safety committee or representative.

SOLEMN EVENTS AND SOCIAL EVENTS

Some labour councils have organized "solemn events," e.g., at lunch time on April 28, with further, social events in the evening, e.g., with a respected health and safety speaker. The idea is to involve families and the public, as well as the workers directly affected by workplace death, injury, and disease.

We try to stress:

- ✓ action as well as mourning: "fight for the living";
- ✓ prevention as well as compensation;
- ✓ public and community events as well as events for labour.

When the National Day of Mourning falls on a weekend, some unions are trying to organize:

- ✓ workplace observations on the weekday closest to April 28;
- ✓ dignified ceremonies in the daytime on April 28;
- ✓ evening events such as a community supper or (indoor) picnic.

SCHOOL ACTIVITY

It is likely that school activities will form a central part of the CLC's Annual National Day of Mourning. Some unions are trying to interest school boards in putting on events in schools on April 28. Ideas include:

- ✓ presentations by unionists, with a video, assisted by the school secretary or janitor/caretaker;
- ✓ flags flown at half-mast and a minute's silence at 11:00 a.m.;
- ✓ making connections between workplace accidents and conditions in the school;
- ✓ a school inspection by the students (not to be confused with regular workplace inspections by the unionized staff);
- ✓ stickers for certifying "safe and healthy" and "environmentally friendly" projects;
- ✓ demonstrations of "control of hazards at the source," e.g., in chemistry and biology laboratories;
- ✓ awards for achievement in "control at the source."