

Letter to Branches

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To: All Branches

Workers' Memorial Day - 28th April 2007 - 'Enforcement & Inspection'

This year's Workers' Memorial Day theme is '**Health and Safety needs not just regulations, but also enforcement & Inspection**'

The purpose behind Workers' Memorial Day has always been to "remember the dead: fight for the living" and unions are asked to focus on both areas, by considering memorials to all those killed through work but at the same time ensuring that such tragedies are not repeated. That can best be done by building trade union organisation, and campaigning for stricter enforcement with higher penalties for breaches of health & safety laws.

Earlier the International TUC had announced the worldwide themes for 2007 International Commemoration Day (Workers Memorial Day 2007) would be "Cancer, enforcement, Global unions, HIV and Asbestos campaigns. However the European TUC and the UK TUC Union Health and Safety Specialists Committee considered the proposal from the ITUC and have agreed that they would support a 'single theme' and that this theme should be "enforcement/inspection". *Covering 5 issues was seen as far too wide.* They were concerned that the ITUC proposal would dilute the effect of the Day. This is consistent with the view expressed by the TUC UHSS last year who also asked for a theme built around enforcement activity due to problems being experienced in the UK.

28 April became an international commemoration day in 1996 at the United Nations in New York when a Global Union delegation lit a Commemoration Candle to highlight the plight of workers who die, are injured or become ill each year due to unsustainable forms of work and production. Since then, the number of commemoration events known as Workers Memorial Day in the UK has grown, and they now take place in nearly 120 countries. These include a wide range of activities, from large rallies and sectoral mobilisations to educational and lobbying events, including basic information dissemination. In addition, many unions take the opportunity on 28 April to publicise the results of such actions as workplace assessments and surveys, as well as to announce initiatives they intend to pursue.

International Commemoration Day for Dead and Injured Workers". 28 April is now formally recognised nationally by governments in 14 countries or territories: Argentina, Belgium, Bermuda, Brazil, Canada, Dominican Republic, Greece, Luxembourg, Panama, Peru, Panama, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Taiwan. Therefore, initiatives to engage your governments to do the same could be planned for at an early stage.

2005 World injury and fatality statistics: Each year, over two million women and men die as a result of 270 million occupational accidents and 160 million new cases of occupational disease each year, figures that are supplemented by ILO/WHO (International Labour Organisation/World Health Organisation) estimates that occupational diseases alone cause over 1.7 million deaths, and that at least 268 million non-fatal workplace accidents occur each year. It is furthermore estimated that over half

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of the 355,000 on-the-job fatalities occur in agriculture, the sector with half the world's workforce. Other high risk sectors are mining, construction and commercial fishing. Four percent of the world's gross domestic product (US \$1,251 billion) is lost through absence of work from injury, death and disease, sickness treatment, disability and survivor benefits. Illness results in a loss of four or more working days in at least 1/3 of all cases. The loss in GDP resulting from the cost of death and illness in the work force is 20 times greater than all official development assistance to developing countries. Each year, 12,000 children are killed on the job and hazardous substances kill 340,000 workers annually, while asbestos alone claims about 100,000 lives.

What can you do?

- Safety Reps get together through the Regional Health and Safety Forums to plan for the day;
- Get local management to allow some form of recognition of the day, such as one minute's silence to remember anyone who has died at your workplace.
- Ask your local council, or any other public body to become involved, fly official flags at half-mast on the day; and/or
- Write a letter to the local press;
- Write to local MPs about formal recognition of WMD as in 14 other countries (the Officer has written to the Prime Minister for the last three years on this and in 2005 the then Secretary of State for Work Alan Johnson stated "I am pleased to offer support for the many memorial services and ceremonies that are taking place today on International Workers Memorial Day");
- **Organise a Safety Information Event in a specific workplace;**
- Organise a local meeting on health and safety and the need for more corporate accountability, HSE resources and Inspectors and improved rights for Safety Reps. Invite a HSE spokesperson or HSE Inspectors Union Rep;
- You could focus on a particular issues of concern in your workplaces, such as working conditions, manual handling, working at height, violence, lone working, occupational health, risk assessment et;
- Arrange an event such as planting a memorial tree in a public place, putting up a plaque, dedicating a sculpture, a piece of art, or a bench, to remember workers who have been killed at the workplace or in the community;
- Ask local religious centres to include Workers' Memorial Day in their worship during the Week;
- Distribute purple 'forget-me-not' ribbons (the symbol of Workers Memorial Day), car stickers and leaflets telling workers about the day;
- Finding out what other unions, your local Hazards group, or regional TUC or local Trades Council are planning and taking part or organising a joint event. Work with other Unions and Trades Councils in your area - find out what others have planned as early as possible and join in to make it a big event;

If you are organising or participating in an event for Workers Memorial Day then please send the Health, Safety & Environment Department the details.

The Health, Safety & Environment Department will once again be preparing WMD Posters for distribution and will be placing a half-page CWU WMD add in the Hazards Magazine WMD Special Edition.

The Greater Manchester Hazards centre has once again produced resources on Workers Memorial day including 'forget-me-not' ribbons, car stickers and posters - contact <http://www.gmhazards.org.uk> or e-mail mail@gmhazards.org.uk. GMH Web-Links: Safety Reps Guide : <http://www.gmhazards.org.uk/SReps%20Guide07.pdf>, Background leaflet: <http://www.gmhazards.org.uk/WMD%20Lft07.pdf>, Car Sticker order form: <http://www.gmhazards.org.uk/wmdstof.doc>, 'forget-me-not' ribbons order form: <http://www.gmhazards.org.uk/wmdribbonof.doc>

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London Hazards Centre: Organising for Workers' Memorial Day Fact Sheet:
<http://www.lhc.org.uk/members/pubs/factsht/68fact.htm>, WMD Resources activities
nationwide, Lobby your MP sample letter, WMD background
etc:<http://www.hazardscampaign.org.uk/wmd/index.htm>

Yours sincerely

Dave Joyce
National Health, Safety & Environment Officer

Att.

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