

Australian workers grieve for lives lost in workplaces: International Workers Memorial Day

Families of victims of workplace deaths will join with unions at rallies and memorial services tomorrow (Tuesday 28 April) to mark lives lost in workplace accidents.

Loved ones, colleagues and unions will also call for greater health and safety protections for workers.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow said this year's International Workers Memorial Day events will highlight the poor level of health and safety and discrimination faced by construction workers as a result of the Howard Government-created Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC).

Ms Burrow, who will speak at a Brisbane rally said: "The ABCC powers are coercive, designed to intimidate building workers and provide fewer rights for those working in the construction industry. They must be abolished."

She said the rising human and economic cost of workplace death should send a strong signal to State and Territory governments that health and safety standards should not be watered down.

Over the past year in Queensland alone, 20 construction workers have lost their lives.

In 2004-5, prior to the introduction of the ABCC and special laws which discriminate against building workers, 19 workers died on construction sites nationally, but in 2005-6, the figure jumped to 29 and rose again in 2007 to 33 deaths.

"The lack of action to reduce workplace deaths and improve health and safety on construction sites is further evidence of the need to disband the ABCC and abolish discriminatory laws for the industry.

"When lives are at stake, we need to be improving health and safety standards, not cutting corners or victimising workers who speak out about health and safety," said Ms Burrow.

A new report from the Australian Safety and Compensation Council conservatively estimates there are 7,000 work-related deaths each year — more than four times the Australian road toll (see factsheet attached).

"Unions support the development of new harmonised national workplace health and safety laws but it is essential the new laws deliver the highest standards and that the rights of every Australian worker are strengthened and not diminished," said Ms Burrow.

"Workplace safety representatives are fundamental to protecting health and safety and unions will vigorously oppose any watering down of their rights and consultation arrangements.

"It is also vital that the new laws allow unions to initiate prosecutions over breaches of workplace safety where other agencies have failed to do so and that the onus is on employers to prove they have provided a safe and healthy workplace.



MEDIA ALERT

International Workers Memorial Day

Tuesday 28 April 2009

EVENTS

Brisbane

9.30 am Rally and March from Queens Park (Cnr George, Mary and William Street, City) to Parliament. ACTU President **Sharan Burrow to address rally at Parliament**. Details: Tania Reeves QCU: (07) 3846 2468.

Melbourne

10.30am Victorian Trades Hall Council will hold a joint ceremony with Industrial Deaths, Support and Advocacy Inc. at Argyle Square,(off Lygon St) Construction unions will also hold a rally and stop work at 10:00am on the steps of Trades Hall. Details: VTHC (03) 9659 3511.

Sydney

One minute silence across NSW building sites (various times) and an event at 12.30pm at Reflection Park, Little Pier St, Darling Harbour opposite Sydney Entertainment Centre. Details: Claire Johnston, Unions NSW, (02) 9881 9112.

Canberra

10am Memorial Service 189 Flemington Road Mitchell (Parking off Lysaght Street) Details: Unions ACT (02) 6247 7844.

Perth

9.30 am Gather at the Perth Esplanade, opposite the Bell Tower, March to Solidarity Park, Parliament House for official commemoration. Details: CFMEU (08) 9221 1055.

Adelaide

10am Ecumenical Church Service at Baptist Church, 65 Flinders Street, Adelaide
11am CFMEU rally, Victoria Park, Details: SA Unions (08) 8279 2222.

Tasmania

11am, Memorial Service in main auditorium, Baha'i Centre of Learning 1 Tasman Highway, (behind ABC Hobart) Details: Susan Wallace, Unions Tas, (03) 62349553.

Darwin

A minutes silence in workplaces –plus MayDay 1 May, Details Union NT: Melinda Simpson (08) 89 415712.

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