

Day of Mourning
April 28, 2016

SAMPLE OP-ED

Twenty-five years ago, Canada proclaimed April 28 as the National Day of Mourning for workers injured or killed on the job.

Every year since, local unions and labour councils have marked the day with ceremonies of remembrance for colleagues, friends and family who were killed because of workplace-related hazards and incidents.

But that's not the only thing that April 28 is about. We can't bring back those who have died, but we can commit to make workplaces safer. That's why this April 28, Canadian unions are calling for a national ban on asbestos, a known killer that causes disease, suffering and death—all of it preventable.

More than 2,000 people die every year in Canada from diseases caused by exposure to asbestos, like mesothelioma, lung cancer and asbestosis. It is the number one cause of occupational death in Canada. Deaths from mesothelioma increased by 60 percent between 2000 and 2012.

Despite this, imports of items that contain asbestos, like brake pads and cement pipes, are on the rise. The lack of a formal registry of buildings known to contain asbestos adds to the risk of needless exposure. But plans for new spending on infrastructure as all levels of government make it all the more urgent to put a ban in place now to guarantee those projects – roads, transit stations, and other public places – are asbestos free.

There are safe alternatives to asbestos. Asbestos-free brake pads are manufactured in Guelph, Ontario. Asbestos-free ceiling tiles are produced in Langley, British Columbia. This means that substituting for safe alternatives will create Canadian jobs and support Canadian industries.

Unions have already made a difference over the past year by helping make the places where all Canadians (not just union members) work safer. They have fostered workplace protections for victims of domestic violence, with changes to provincial laws moving forward in Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario.

This year, Canada can take a giant step forward with a comprehensive ban on asbestos to make all of our workplaces, homes and public spaces safer and healthier.