



National Day of Mourning Statement April 28, 2016

On this Day of Mourning, let's make all Canadians safer Let's win a comprehensive ban on asbestos

On Thursday, April 28, the flag on Parliament Hill will fly at half-mast and people across the country will light candles, don ribbons and remember colleagues, friends and family who have been killed because of workplace-related hazards and incidents.

We can't bring back those who have died, but we are working hard to make workplaces safer today. 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.

It is estimated that 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 and since 1996, asbestos-related diseases have accounted for about a third of the workplace deaths recognized by workers' compensation boards.

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 also adds to the risk of needless exposure. Plans for new spending on infrastructure at all levels of government make it urgent to put a ban in place now to guarantee those projects are asbestos free.

Unions have already made a difference over the past year by reducing the hazards people face when working in confined spaces. They have fostered workplace protections for victims of domestic violence. Recognizing that not all injuries are physical, unions are also taking on the stigma of mental illness and factoring it into what makes a workplace healthy and safe.

Those unions, through organizations like the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), continue to stand up for the health and safety of everyone who works for a living. They work with employers to improve working conditions. They work with governments to improve workplace health and safety standards and pass laws to punish employers who put lives at risk for their own gain.

Twenty-five years ago, the federal government proclaimed April 28 as the National Day of Mourning for workers injured or killed on the job. This year, Canada can take a giant step forward with a ban on asbestos to make all of our workplaces, homes and public spaces safer and healthier.

Together, let's work to make it happen.