The International Day Of Mourning



INTRODUCTION

Each year on **April 28th**, the world observes the **International Day of Mourning** (sometimes called the Day of Mourning or Workers' Memorial Day). This is a time to remember workers who have lost their lives or been severely injured on the job, and to commit ourselves to preventing such tragedies in the future. I'd like to spend a few minutes reflecting on the history and significance of this day, share some statistics on workplace injuries and fatalities, and close with a true story of loss that underscores why this observance is so important.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The International Day of Mourning originated in Canada in the early 1980s. Initially, it was a day set aside by labor organizations to remember colleagues who had died or been injured at work. Eventually, this day gained **official government recognition** in Canada in 1991. Over time, it spread internationally, and today more than **100 countries** observe April 28th as a day to commemorate workers who have suffered workplace injuries or lost their lives on the job.

SIGNIFICANCE AND PURPOSE

1. **Remembrance**: We pause to honor the memories of those who are no longer with us because of workplace accidents, illnesses, or injuries.
1. **Renewed Commitment**: By reflecting on lives lost, we reinforce our responsibility to maintain and improve safety standards.
1. **Awareness**: This day highlights the ongoing need for stronger safety policies, training, and communication.
1. **Prevention**: Knowledge of past incidents helps inform better protocols, aiming to reduce the risk of future tragedies.

Ultimately, the Day of Mourning is a powerful reminder that **no job is worth a life** and that safety measures must always be a top priority in every workplace."

KEY STATISTICS

- **Global Estimates**: According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), **around 2.3 million** people worldwide die each year due to work-related accidents or diseases. That's an average of **over 6,000 deaths every single day**.

- **National Figures**: In Canada, official data often shows **close to 1,000 worker fatalities** reported annually—an average of almost **3 fatalities per day**. Similar proportions are found in many countries globally.
- **Injuries**: For every fatality, there are thousands of serious injuries and countless near misses—events that could easily have become tragic, underscoring the importance of vigilant safety procedures.

These statistics are stark, but they serve as the backdrop for why we pause on April 28th. Behind every number is a person—a family member, a friend, a coworker.

A STORY OF LOSS

I'd like to share a real story, told with permission from the family involved, to illustrate just how devastating a workplace fatality can be.

A Father's Legacy
Ralph was a 52-year-old electrician known for his meticulous nature and warm sense of humor. One morning, he was troubleshooting a faulty electrical panel at an industrial site. A series of small oversights—improper insulation on wires, a missing lockout/tagout procedure, and a tight production deadline—converged into a tragic moment. Ralph was electrocuted when a live wire made unexpected contact.

His colleagues rushed to help, but it was too late. Ralph didn't survive.

- He left behind a wife, two teenage children, and a circle of friends who described him as the 'heart of the family.'
- At his funeral, his daughter, who was just 16 at the time, spoke tearfully about how she wouldn't have her father around to see her graduate or walk her down the aisle someday.
- The ripple effect went beyond his family; coworkers struggled with guilt and anxiety, and the entire community felt the loss of a man who had been so vital in their lives.

Ralph's tragedy highlights the **human cost** of workplace hazards. Even small procedural gaps—a missing label, an unverified switch—can result in irreparable harm. Stories like this show us why **consistent safety training** and **strict adherence to protocols** matter so deeply. They keep us from becoming the next heartbreaking statistic.

HOW WE CAN HONOUR THIS DAY

1. **Pause and Reflect**: Take a moment of silence on April 28th to remember workers like Ralph who never made it home.
1. **Review Safety Protocols**: Use this day as a prompt to revisit lockout/tagout procedures, emergency response plans, and personal protective equipment guidelines.
1. **Share Knowledge**: Encourage open discussions about hazards, near misses, and improvements that could save lives.
1. **Commit to Action**: Whether it's upgrading equipment or advocating for better training, make tangible changes that enhance workplace safety.

CONCLUSION

As we mark the International Day of Mourning, remember the lives lost and the families forever changed by workplace tragedies. This day is not just about sadness,

but about resolve—the resolve to ensure safe conditions for ourselves and our coworkers. Let’s use this observance as a driving force to **reinforce** our commitment to safety, so that stories like Ralph’s become fewer and fewer each year, and every worker can return home safely at the end of the day.