



# Worker rights—priority one

A message from Dave Killham  
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We all expect to arrive home healthy and safe after a day's work. We should, it's our right.

Before us many fought to enshrine this right into law. Our workplaces are safer and healthier today thanks to their efforts.

Now it's our turn to protect and build upon those early gains. Every April 28 we observe a National Day of Mourning for workers killed or who suffer injury or disease as a result of their work. There's no better time to renew our commitment to worker health and safety.

This year too, a celebration of recent gains is certainly in order. As a result of a long and persistent lobby led by labour activists, the Ontario government has finally announced its intention to legislate requirements for employers to prevent workplace violence.

Many are also cautiously optimistic about the recently proposed and long-demanded *Toxics Reduction Act*. If passed, Ontario could become the first Canadian jurisdiction to require certain employers to develop a plan to reduce the use and production of hazardous workplace chemicals.

Other labour campaigns helped win worker protection against needle stick injuries and pesticides. In recent years, workers in the federal jurisdiction also won regulations on hazard prevention programs, workplace violence and ergonomics.

As always though, we must remain vigilant. Look at the record. Last year Ontario workers reported 488 fatality claims and 317,031 claims for work-related injuries and disease to the Workplace Safety & Insurance Board. Almost as many again go unreported, a number likely to increase during this recession as workers fear employer reprisals and job loss.

Workers still seek protection against working conditions that can lead to musculoskeletal disorders. Occupational disease rates are at epidemic proportions. New workers remain vulnerable, most never receiving even basic health and safety training. Government reports also tell us many workplaces have yet to certify representatives of joint health and safety committees

or even establish joint committees. How will we ever address hazards and reduce worker suffering when those charged with pivotal prevention responsibilities lack the basic training and skills to fulfill their legal duties?

It takes years to lobby for new laws, but in days or weeks workers can receive training to help protect their lives. The choice seems obvious. Better training standards to ensure workers and their representatives receive the comprehensive training they need to lead prevention efforts is surely the next logical and necessary step.

At the Workers Health & Safety Centre (WHSC) our comprehensive programs not only meet but exceed legal training requirements. As Ontario's designated health and safety training centre our training programs and information resources help workers and workplace representatives fully understand and fully exercise their rights to safe and healthy work.

Using our unique worker centered development and delivery model our training programs also cover dozens of occupational hazards. To round out our commitment to training excellence WHSC-qualified instructors apply their workplace experience and grounding in adult education to provide a comprehensive, real-world learning experience.

Working together, we have achieved much. Working together, we must achieve more. We can truly improve our record and reduce the burden workers and their families suffer when we eliminate hazards, bolster worker rights and support workers and workplace representatives with the kind of quality training they deserve.

On Day of Mourning and every day this is our first priority. We work to help make this everyone's priority.

**NOTE:** On April 28 show your support by participating in a Day of Mourning event in your community. Local labour councils and their many community partners have organized some 40 events across Ontario. [See our event listing for details.](#)

To learn more visit [www.whsc.on.ca](http://www.whsc.on.ca) or call from anywhere in Ontario 1-888-869-7950.

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