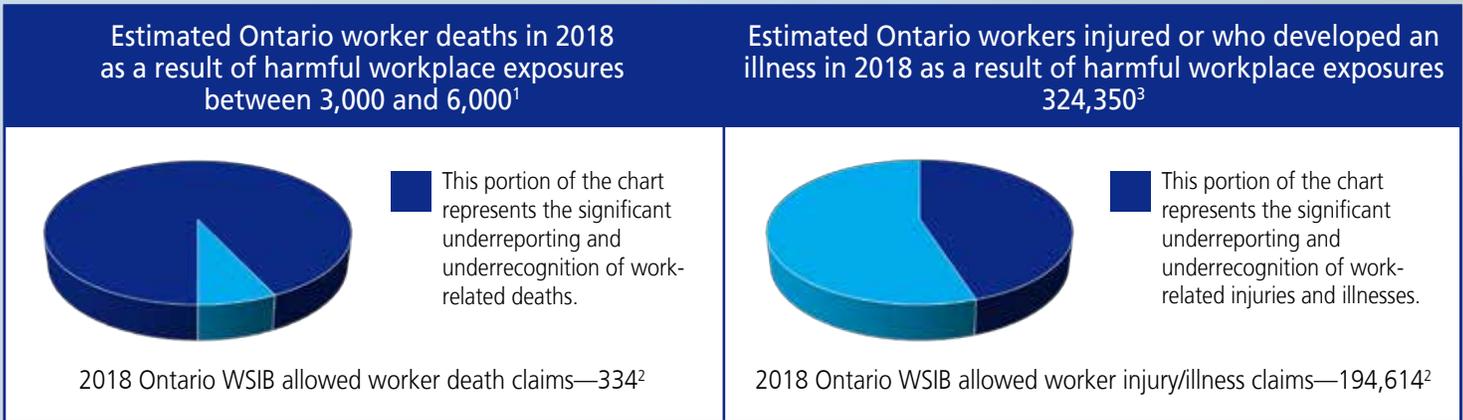


REFLECTING REALITY

A more accurate picture of occupational injuries, disease and death

Claims allowed by Ontario's Workplace Safety & Insurance Board (WSIB) have become the default statistics shared by many when discussing the number of workers killed, injured or who develop illnesses each year as a result of harmful exposures at work. The experiences of workers, their families and a growing body of research evidence make it clear **WSIB statistics fail to reflect the reality workers confront**. Most worker deaths and many injuries/illnesses caused by unsafe and unhealthy working conditions are never reported to, or recognized by the WSIB and why their statistics are an entirely inaccurate picture of the real cost of unsafe and unhealthy work. This is particularly the case for cancer, lung disease and other occupational illnesses with long latency periods between workplace exposures and disease onset. And what will be the experience we take away this year? Many workers have been deemed essential during the COVID-19 crisis. Should they become ill will this illness be presumed work-related and hence affected workers properly compensated and properly reflected in WSIB statistics?

Reporting a more accurate picture of the suffering experienced by workers, their families and their community may wake people up and help to kick-start the workplace and regulatory efforts essential to eliminating and/or controlling workplace hazards. When taking action, both the precautionary principle and hierarchy of controls should be the driving force. Only then will we be satisfied every reasonable precaution in the circumstances has been taken to safeguard worker well-being.



¹ More than 35 years ago Dr. Annalee Yassi estimated 6,000 work-related deaths annually in Ontario from cancer, cardiovascular and pulmonary diseases (source – *Occupational Disease and Worker Compensation in Ontario*, 1983 report for Paul C. Weiler in his study of Workers' Compensation of Ontario; pg.17). A growing body of research supports this troubling truth. For instance, studies suggest between five and 16 per cent of all cancers are work-related. Based on these percentages and cancer death estimates provided by the Canadian Cancer Society between 1,505 and 4,816 Ontarians will die in 2020 from work-related cancer. Of course these statistics don't include the thousands more killed as a result of other occupational illnesses. In a study published in the fall of 2018, University of Ottawa researchers suggest a more accurate picture of worker deaths would number between 9,800 and 13,200 Canadians—between 10 and 13 times higher than fatalities reported by the Association of Workers Compensation Boards of Canada. Although, even this staggering toll, the report concludes, is a conservative estimate.

² By the Numbers: 2018 WSIB Statistical Report (most recent published statistics).

³ Estimates of underreporting of occupational injuries and illness to compensation systems range from 20 to 70 per cent. The lower estimate was suggested by Ontario's WSIB in a 2013 report. In the middle of this spectrum is a 2002 Canadian study entitled, How many injured workers do not file claims for Workers' Compensation Benefits, that suggested 40 per cent of workers injured at work did not submit a claim.