

THE BWI SAYS: **ORGANISE!**

**Strong Unions
Save Lives**

**Your job should provide
you with a living - not
cause your death!**



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www.bwint.org

International Workers Memorial Day

April 28th 2007

Each year on the 28th April trade unions around the world organise events to celebrate International Workers Memorial Day. The purpose is to highlight the preventable nature of workplace accidents and ill health, and to promote campaigns and union organisation to improve health and safety at work. It is also a day to remember all those who have died because of their job.

The workers in trades represented by the Building and Wood Workers International do some of the most dangerous jobs of all. We are often exposed to hazardous dust and chemicals, including deadly asbestos fibres contained in building materials. We work at heights, in confined spaces, we lift heavy loads and operate dangerous machinery.

BWI members among the hardest hit by fatal “accidents” and occupational diseases

- Each year about one hundred thousand building workers are killed on site and thousands more are injured or made ill because of bad and illegal working conditions.
- Tropical loggers have about a one in ten chance of being killed over a working lifetime.
- Wood working machinery causes more injuries than machinery in any other sector.

Deadly diseases caused by bad working conditions

- Asbestos kills – we want it banned. Nearly 300 people die each DAY from asbestos lung disease, most of them worked in the building trades. Many cement products used in building materials contain asbestos.
- Common workplace substances used every day in our sectors can cause cancer, and need to be strictly controlled : Wood dust; cement dust; solvents used in glues, fillers, paints, lacquers and varnishes; isocyanates; formaldehyde; several pesticides used in forestry plantations and for treating timber; welding fumes.

(For fact sheets on these hazards go to the health and safety section of our website: www.bwint.org)

These risks are well known and so are the solutions to avoid them. By far the greatest risk for our health and safety is the negligence of employers who do not comply with even basic legislation to protect people at work.

Deregulation, subcontracting chains, bogus self employment and informal contractual conditions make this situation even worse, undermining trade union and labour rights. In a number of countries we are seeing a worrying increase in accident rates. Management has the legal responsibility to ensure that collective and individual prevention measures are in place to protect the safety and health of all those who work for their companies. Negligent employers try to avoid these responsibilities by avoiding an employment relationship.

The solutions: You can help to change things for the better by joining us in the BWI campaign for good, safe jobs.

Write to your government with the following proposals:

- Workers’ participation Trade Unions make an important contribution to the prevention of accidents and ill health at work. Trade Union Safety Representatives should be elected to represent workers interests on health and safety. Joint management– union Health and Safety Committees should be established, as is already required by law in many countries

- ILO Conventions should be ratified and Codes of Practice on health and safety for construction, wood and forestry should be applied.
- Legislation on health and safety should be improved to at least meet ILO standards.
- Information, training and advice should be given to employers and workers.
- Enforcement of legislation by government should be stronger. Employers who break the law should be prosecuted. Employers whose negligence results in serious injuries should face big fines and the threat of losing their right to operate a company. In the case of criminal negligence, where employers deliberately exposed workers to serious risks, they should face the possibility of imprisonment, as already happens in some countries.
- Contractual conditions should be improved to provide stable employment.
- Asbestos should be banned, and workers protected from exposure.

What you can do on and around International Workers Memorial Day

Local events

- Get in touch with the local press to let them know what's going on and why. Send them a press release, briefly describing any events which are being organised, and invite them to attend so they can take photos and interview people. If there has been a fatality, or major injury or a problem with occupational ill health in your locality, this may create a focus for the day.
- Memorial ceremonies in a public place, involve local authorities, plant a tree, put up a plaque in memory of those who have died
- Memorial services, candle lighting ceremonies

Workplace activities

- Organise to stop work for a formal two minutes of silence in remembrance of all the workers who have been killed over the last year.
- Organise meetings to give information on health and safety or carry out a health and safety training session.
- Carry out a walk-through inspection of the workplace to identify health and safety problems.
- Try to get everyone in the workplace involved, including management.

National initiatives

- Contact your national trade union centre to ask them for support.
- Write letters to employers organisations asking them to comply with health and safety legislation and to improve OSH standards in our industries
- Write to the relevant administrations who have responsibilities for health and safety, asking them to enforce the legislation.
- Organise a meeting to discuss the prevention of accidents and ill health at work.

Apart from writing letters, it may be possible to organise a demonstration to actually deliver the letters to government and / or employers' organisations. This is a good way to get media interest, and to create public support, particularly if there is some symbolic activity such as lighting candles or laying a wreath.

Please report back to us on your activities, send us photos.

For further details contact:

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