



Dying for a Job?

In order to prevent Canadian employee injuries and fatalities, serious amendments are needed regarding how our workplace safety regulations are enforced.

Many people in this country are dying to find a job, one that will let them live a comfortable life. These people, however, may not have any idea about how safe and healthy their workplaces will be.

The sad truth is that every year in Canada, an average of 900 Canadians actually do *die for a job*, approximately 85 percent of whom are between the ages of 15 and 24. An average of 330,000 Canadians will be injured on the job each year, and will need to miss work because of injury. More than 30,000 of these injuries will be to workers between the ages of 15 and 24.

Canada has some of the best health and safety legislation and regulations in the world, so what can explain the alarming rates of worker death and injury?

As someone who has spent decades dealing with health and safety in the workplace, I've reached some conclusions about workplace deaths and injuries—the causes, consequences, and solutions.

Some would argue that the issue is complicated and the solutions are not easily found. My short response to that is that it is, in fact, not complicated. Between 1993 and 2015, nearly 21,000 Canadian workers were killed on the job. During the same period, 7,604,518 workers received injuries that caused them to lose time from work. Thousands of those lives could have been saved and hundreds of thousands of those workplace injuries could have been prevented. Billions of dollars in lost productivity and billions of dollars spent on health care could also have been saved.

Recently, I was told that the statistics are better than they used to be. Unfortunately, this is not true. In fact, in 2015 there was only a one fatality difference in comparison to 1993. During most of the years in between, the numbers were higher. The incidence of workplace injuries appears to have dropped substantially; however, that too is deceiving. Recent evidence shows that employers, in an attempt to prevent their Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) or Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) premiums from going up, are convincing injured workers not to file claims and giving employees make-work projects to keep them in the workplace.

Corporations and government regulators need to place more emphasis on protecting workers rather than protecting the interests and profits of corporations. While our country has strong legislation, regulations, and standards in place regarding workplace

safety, we lack the means to enforce them, especially when they may directly interfere with a company's business plan. Workplace injuries and fatalities should not be the cost of doing business in Canada, however.

At the moment, there is no real incentive for employers to clean up their act. They know that the chances of being caught as a negligent employer are low because regulatory agencies are not committed to enforcement. With regulatory agencies' staffing levels woefully low and pushback coming from employers, including lobbying for less regulation, any existing legislation that was designed to protect workers from death and injury is being inadequately upheld and enforced.

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It's time that law makers, police forces, and regulatory agencies do their jobs to help stop the dangerous workplace conditions that Canadian workers face too frequently.

If past statistics hold true, approximately 180 to 200 workers have already been killed in Canada this year, and 2 to 3 more workers will die every day.

Will it be you, your brother, sister, father, mother, son, or daughter? Who else will die for a job before the end of the year? ☹

Bill Chedore
National Coordinator,
Canadian Injured Workers Alliance (CIWA)

PAIN MANAGEMENT

The Painful Truth About Work Injuries

Can you imagine leaving for work one morning with high expectations about how your job will help you secure your future plans, and by the end of that day having your life changed forever because of a workplace accident? And further, can you imagine living in unrelenting pain for the rest of your life as a result of that accident? Workplace injury results in short-term (acute) pain that can lead to long-term (chronic) pain. Far too often, injured workers join the ranks of the seven million Canadians living with undermanaged chronic pain (that is, lasting for longer than three months or beyond the normal time of healing).

The hidden truth about chronic pain

Often invisible, as the injured person may appear fine and seem to have recovered, pain sometimes brings with it misunderstandings in daily and work life when the person is disbelieved and stigmatized as a complainer, malingerer, or drug seeker. The truth is that chronic pain drastically impacts a person's quality of life, including their physical, psychological, emotional, personal, and spiritual well-being, encompassed within family, social, and work responsibilities.

The best solution for managing chronic pain requires developing and being dedicated to a daily, personalized pain management plan. This includes accessing multidisciplinary pain care through health professionals like your doctor, an occupational therapist, and a psychologist; learning and implementing self-help skills such as pacing, meditation, and exercise; and actively directing one's lifestyle toward meaningful, fulfilling activities and work. Continued changes to Canada's health care system, improved education for health professionals, and the development of extensive programs for pain sufferers are needed to make this level of pain care possible.

Pain management essential in returning to work

Recent systematic literature reviews and consultations with injured workers and return to work specialists have revealed a pressing need to aggressively integrate effective pain management techniques with return to work planning. Optimal outcomes for transitioning back to work and continuing work while living with pain will depend on collaborative efforts to develop support programs, resources and alternative opportunities for workers, along with improved awareness building and knowledge transfer for employers, work colleagues, insurers, and helping professionals like workers' advisors.

Let's work together to make a strong investment for Canadians with regards to safe work environments and vastly improved return to work scenarios that include sensitivity to necessary pain management. ☹

Lynn Cooper
President, Canadian Pain Coalition,
CIWA Advisor



On April 28th, we remember all the workers who never came home from work.

The WSIB helps those whose lives have been forever changed by workplace fatalities, injuries and illnesses. On the National Day of Mourning, we honour them.

Visit wsibdayofmourning.ca

