

PEI Federation of Labour's President's Speech for the 2009 Day of Mourning Ceremony

Sisters & Brothers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Honoured Guests,

I want to thank all of you for coming here today to remember and honour those workers who have died or who have been injured on the job here on PEI.

Twenty-five years ago, the Canadian Labour Congress declared April 28 a National Day of Mourning for workers killed or injured on the job to raise awareness of the thousands of workers whose lives were forever changed by injury and the hundreds who died every year. In 1990, Parliament passed the Workers Mourning Day Act to formally recognize April 28 as a "day of mourning" across Canada.

According to the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada, in 2007, 1055 Canadians, including 2 workers from PEI, died in workplace accidents. That works out to almost 3 deaths per day. It is because of this very scary fact that this year's lapel stickers asks such a very harsh yet important question "**Is Today The Day You Die at Work?**".

This question is so important to ask ourselves because too many workers think that it can't happen to them and that prevents them from truly giving workplace safety the day to day consideration it deserves. The price of workplace safety is truly eternal vigilance. We must keep it in our mind at all times because a tragic accident can happen so quickly and easily. The resulting emotional, physical, and economic costs are so high that we must make workplace safety **a top priority each and everyday.**

Workplace Safety is everyone's responsibility. In addition to doing more as workers on the jobsite, we must ensure that the Provincial Government never forgets their responsibilities regarding putting in place

- **proper workplace safety legislation,**
- **enforcement** and
- **education.**

It seems today that we are spending too much time figuring out “what happened” and fixing things after it’s already too late rather than **educating, inspecting, and ensuring** that injuries and deaths are prevented .

The Province must ensure that the **penalties, resources, personnel, and political will** are there to ensure that the Occupational Health and Safety Act is properly **enforced and respected**, and that workers and employers are properly educated on their rights and responsibilities. It is very disappointing that the province has not acted on our call for more OH and S inspectors from our speech last year.

Currently the Provincial government is reviewing the recommendations made by the Worker’s Compensation Act Review Committee. The most significant recommendation to come out of the committee’s report was to remove the three-day waiting period. As with the 3 Day waiting period in New Brunswick and the 2 Day Waiting period in Nova Scotia, the 3 Day waiting period in PEI and **has lead to significant under-reporting of workplace injuries.**

Between 1984-2001, before the introduction of the 3 Day waiting period in 2002, Islanders suffered 37,833 time-loss injuries for an average of 2102 time loss injuries per year. Between 2002-2007 Islanders suffered 6183 time-loss injuries for an average of 1030 time-loss injuries per year. The number of time-loss injuries has been halved but we have to ask:

Are any less Islanders getting injured?
Are Island workplaces any safer?

The PEI Federation of the Labour has to say NO. The three day waiting period is not meant to improve workplace safety. It is specifically meant to cut costs for Worker’s Compensation and employers by putting extra pressure on workers to not report injuries and deny injured workers compensation for legitimate injuries. To penalize injured workers in this way is despicable.

The PEI Federation firmly feels that no worker with a legitimate injury should ever be forced to continue working because they are denied fair compensation. The Three Day Waiting Period goes against the basic foundation upon which Worker’s Compensation was created and needs to be removed from the Act.

While most of the recommendations coming out of the recent review were positive, there were a few negative ones. The negative recommendation that stands

out the most is the recommendation to lower the already low wage loss benefit from the current 80% of Net Earnings for the first 38 weeks and 85% of Net Earnings there after to a straight 80% of net for the duration of the claim. The worker's representatives on the review committee vehemently opposed this recommendation and we feel that it is ridiculous to take a wage loss benefit rate which is already the third lowest in the country and further reduce it down to the second lowest. We feel that instead of lowering this rate it **should be raised to 90% of net earnings** to fall more in line with the rest of the country.

We hope that this Provincial government will use this opportunity to finally create a Worker's Compensation Act that truly meets and respects the needs of injured workers on PEI.

The PEI Federation of Labour has always firmly believed and continues to fight to ensure that all workers have the right to a safe and healthy work environment and we are fully committed to reaching the ultimate goal of eliminating all workplace fatalities and injuries on PEI including those that have not been recognized as having roots in the workplace; be it illness or occupational disease.

Employers must know that creating an unsafe work environment will not be tolerated on P.E.I. It is all of our responsibilities to ensure safe working conditions not only now but in the future.

In conclusion, the Day of Mourning offers us an unique opportunity, that we must take advantage of, to not only stand together in remembrance of those who have died or been injured on Island jobsites, but also to commit ourselves to doing what needs to be done to prevent more deaths and injuries.

On this day, our thoughts and prayers are with the families of those who have lost their lives on the job.

We mourn their loss and we pledge to continue to fight for the living so that these tragedies never occur again.

End of Ceremony Closing Remarks

As we leave today's ceremony,

Let us remember those workers who did not make it home safely from work this year and in past years on PEI.

Let us remember, to use this day to realize how important our safety and the safety of our loved ones is and make a commitment to fight to improve workplace safety in anyway we can.

Finally, Let us remember that, in the end, the most important thing that we can bring home safely from our jobs is ourselves.

I would like to thank

Everyone for their attendance today

The Province and the Worker's Compensation Board for their continued support of the Day of Mourning ceremony.

And all those that worked so hard to organize this event

I would like to invite everyone to the reception in Province House