



# A Fundamental Right to Safe and Healthy Work

*28 APRIL: REMEMBER THE DEAD FIGHT FOR THE LIVING*

## **International Workers Memorial Day #IWMD21**

Every year on 28 April all over the world, trade unions, workers, and families hold remembrance events to mark International Workers Memorial Day because work continues to kill millions globally every year, and over 50,000 in this country, 140 a day before the pandemic arrived to make things worse. Last year thousands of workers have died from Covid-19 and we will never know the true number because many weren't tested, hospitalised or recorded and reported as work related infections and deaths. The HSE have just released RIDDOR information and employers have reported just 318 deaths, the ONS report nearly 8000 deaths of workers, but there is no accurate information on the number of workers who have been infected and who have died from Covid-19.

The Hazards Campaign brought Workers Memorial Day to the UK in 1990s with twin aims, to Remember the Dead but also to Fight for the Living and has marked it every year since then. Every year the ILO prioritise a theme and this year it is about ensuring that Health and Safety is a Fundamental Right for all workers.

### **We will remember all those workers who have died:**

- in all work related incidents,
- because of biological infections and
- because of exposures to dangerous substances.

We know that where there is a strong organised trade union with active safety reps, workers were twice as safe before the pandemic and during the pandemic trade unions and safety reps have saved thousands of lives.

### **What is happening on April 28<sup>th</sup>?**

#### **To Remember the Dead – those dying from Covid19 and all work hazards:**

- There will be action across the UK: online meetings and physically distanced outdoor meetings if possible and safe and events in workplaces, and #CoronavirusWalkouts in the UK and across the world. Wear purple ribbons, put car stickers in cars, and wear IWMD face coverings which can all be purchased from Hazards Campaign using the form <https://gmhazards.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Resources-to-support-IWMD21.pdf>
- At home and in the workplace hold up a IWMD poster, stand by your door, gate or in the street. Take and post selfies using the hashtag #IWMD21. Posters will be available from trade unions, Hazards Campaign and Hazards Magazine
- Hazards Campaign supports a call for a one minutes silence at 12.00

- Read out the FACK Statement for #IWMD21 and read out the names of workers who have died in your industry, sector or area
- Add your event to the International Workers Memorial page <http://28april.org/> , names of workers who have died and UK events to the new TUC page <https://www.tuc.org.uk/international-workers-memorial-day-iwmd> and any reports of workers who have died from Covid-19 on the Hazards Campaign Face book page <https://www.facebook.com/Remembercovidworkers>

## In Fighting for the Living

Actions to campaign for Health and Safety to be a Fundamental Right could include:

- Circulating information to members and putting up posters in workplaces
- Writing to MPs, councillors, press releases and letters in local press
- Speakers at different events on why Health and Safety should be a fundamental human right

The pandemic didn't cause our occupational health crisis, it has exposed it. The UK has one of the highest rates of deaths in the world and workers have died because their employers have failed to control the risks of infection and the UK Government has failed to reduce the spread of transmission across our communities and our enforcement authorities have failed to ensure employers are controlling the risks.

We also need to continue to call for UK Governments and employers to 'Stop the pandemic at work' by:

- Ensuring workplaces are only open if they are controlling all the transmission risks.
- Closing all non-essential workplaces until community transmission is low enough to ensure test and trace is working to a high contact level.
- Ensuring that every worker has: a living wage, liveable sick pay and isolation pay from day 1
- Providing precautionary standard of PPE for all workers
- Following a **Zero-Covid strategy** to reduce the transmission of the virus by find, trace, isolate and support is working effectively, quarantine at borders for all and investment in our public health bodies <https://zerocovid.uk/>

Notes:

- See Hazards Campaign for more action ideas - <http://www.hazardscampaign.org.uk/workers-memorial-day> including Light a Candle, put up window displays, Mapping action and memorials by posting on social media and sending information to [mail@gmhzards.org.uk](mailto:mail@gmhzards.org.uk).
- See Hazards Campaign 'The Whole Story' – real figures on total deaths at work <http://www.hazardscampaign.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/thewholestory.pdf>
- The Hazards Campaign has worked with Greater Manchester Hazards Centre and Families Against Corporate Killers to produce three new #IWMD20 films: **Lean on Me** – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKgHih4ODnU&feature=youtu.be> - Families against corporate killers supporting families of those killed at work, and.
- Hazards Campaigners talking about what IWMD means to them. **Fallen tears** <https://youtu.be/HdXICUM9IBI>
- [28April.org](http://28April.org) – International Workers Memorial Day
- Resource request - <https://gmhzards.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Resources-to-support-IWMD21.pdf>

For more information contact [Janet@gmhzards.org.uk](mailto:Janet@gmhzards.org.uk) or phone 07734 317158

<https://sharanburrow.medium.com/saving-lives-at-work-e419e2278e15>

Saving lives at work requires occupational health and safety to be recognised as a fundamental right.

COVID-19 has exposed the risk for workers and without safe workplaces, the risks to the community. With so many frontline workers in health and care, food production and transport, the emergency services and education putting their lives on the line to do vital work, you would think everyone would know that workplace health and safety is one of the key issues in the pandemic. And with so many people having lost their jobs, on forced leave or working from home the role of safe workplaces for a stable economy is obvious.

So you might be surprised to discover that many governments and employers don't think that being protected should be a fundamental worker's right.

The World Health Organisation says in its constitution that "the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being". But the International Labour Organisation has still not been able to implement the decision of its centenary conference in 2019 to include "safe and healthy working conditions in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work".

This year, trade unions around the world will be pressing governments and employers to agree to put that commitment into practice.

Every year, 2.78 million working people die because of something that happens at work. Hundreds of thousands go to work and don't make it home in one piece.

A grim occupational disease like mesothelioma, the cancer of the lining of the lung caused by asbestos.

Being buried under tonnes of agricultural slurry because basic safety precautions were ignored to save money.

And now, fighting for breath because inadequate sick pay provision and social protection mean that workers in the informal sector — two-thirds of the people at work around the world today — are being asked to choose between scraping a living at risk of catching Covid-19 and not putting food on their family table.

Governments have left nurses, doctors, and hospital cleaners without suitable masks to protect them as they treat the dying, like in Brazil where tens of thousands of health workers have died.

Employers have forced migrant workers in Australia to work at punishing paces in freezing conditions, crammed together in meatpacking factories, an ideal breeding ground for the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

And health and safety inspectors in the UK haven't prosecuted a single employer for Covid-19 health and safety breaches in the whole year of the pandemic.

These failures are just the latest in the decades-long disgrace of inadequate occupational health and safety provision. In workplaces where people matter less than profit, where budget cuts put safety on the line, where complaints are punished rather than listened to.

Making occupational health and safety a fundamental right at work — on a par with the prohibition of child and forced labour, discrimination at work, and the right to join a union, bargain collectively and ultimately to take strike action — wouldn't solve every problem at work.

But it would make employers and governments more accountable when they fall short and a working person suffers, often leaving grieving parents, children, wives or husbands.

It would signal that workers have the right to refuse to take unnecessary risks at work. It would strengthen the hand of inspectors and health and safety professionals. It would drive better health and safety standards along the world's supply chains.

And it would reaffirm the right of working people to be informed and consulted by their employers about the hazards in their workplaces — benefitting not just workers but the people they care for. In New York nursing homes, 30% fewer residents died where there was a union present.

Health and safety worker representatives, joint management-union safety committees, stronger laws have all been proven, time and time again, to keep working people and the public safer and healthier.

We're calling on Governments and employer representatives at the ILO Governing Body in March to set a firm date for inserting workplace health and safety in the ILO's fundamental principles and rights, and then deliver on it. Workers and their unions trusted it would happen this year. It just needs leaders committed to saving lives.

People's lives matter more than money. With the Covid-19 pandemic raging in workplaces across the world, the time is now. We can't wait any longer.

See resources on the [Hazards Campaign](#) and [Hazards Magazine](#)

