



REMEMBER ▶ ON APRIL 28



NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING FOR WORKERS INJURED, KILLED OR MADE ILL BY HAZARDOUS WORK.



A MATTER OF PRIORITIES

A MORE ACCURATE PICTURE OF WORKER DISABILITY, DISEASE AND DEATH.

CLAIMS ALLOWED BY ONTARIO'S WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE BOARD (WSIB) HAVE BECOME THE DEFAULT STATISTICS SHARED BY MANY when discussing the number of workers killed, injured or made ill each year by hazardous work.

This practice in many ways is as **an affront to the suffering of workers**, their families and communities. For the experiences of workers and a growing body of research evidence tells us most deaths and many injuries and illnesses caused by exposure to work-related hazards are **never reported to or recognized by the WSIB**. This is particularly the case for cancer and other occupational illnesses with long latency periods between workplace exposure(s) and disease onset. This is likely also the case with respiratory infections, both in terms of cases and deaths caused by workplace transmission. And the same is likely true of mental injuries and workplace violence, both **significant and growing issues** exacerbated by the height of the COVID pandemic and its ongoing aftershocks.

A more accurate picture of worker injuries, illnesses and deaths must be prioritized and widely communicated. This picture is **critical to informing the public**, government regulators, employers and others of the true costs associated with unsafe and unhealthy work environments. Greater awareness **may lend urgency to workplace and regulatory actions** critical to the pursuit of prevention.



THE DISCONNECT

Estimated 2022 Ontario worker deaths as a result of hazardous exposures at work:

2,200

VS.

* WSIB-recognized 2022 Ontario worker death claims

220

Estimated 2022 Ontario worker injuries and illnesses as a result of hazardous exposures at work:

366,500

VS.

* WSIB-recognized 2022 Ontario worker injury and illness claims

183,268



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THE EVIDENCE

IN A 2018 STUDY, University of Ottawa researchers suggest a **more accurate picture of worker deaths** would number between 9,800 and 13,200 Canadians – or 10 to 13 times higher than fatalities reported by provincial and territorial compensation boards. So, for Ontario in 2022, using the lower percentage this would translate into 2,200 worker deaths. Although, whether one multiplies by 10 or 13, the report concludes, **even these are conservative estimates**. Other research has long supported this truth. For instance, Dr. Annalee Yassi estimated 6,000 work-related deaths annually in Ontario from cancer, cardiovascular and pulmonary diseases alone (Occupational Disease and Worker Compensation in Ontario, 1983). In 2017, Occupational Cancer Research Centre and Cancer Care Ontario **produced a report** suggesting occupational exposures are responsible for approximately two to 10 percent of all newly diagnosed cancer cases. Additional research evidence suggests between **five** and **16 per cent** of cancers are work-related. Based on these percentages and estimates provided by the **Canadian Cancer Society** **upwards of 5,000 Ontarians died in 2022 from work-related cancer**.



A similar picture of underreporting has emerged for work-related injury and illness. University of Washington researchers **published evidence in 2019** suggesting even the most conservative estimates indicate **half of work-related injuries and illnesses are not accurately reported** to the appropriate regulatory authority. In 2020, Ontario's Institute of Work and Health (IWH) **published study results** finding 64 per cent of injuries go unreported to a workers' compensation board. **Research led by IWH** and published in 2021 found more than half of British Columbia workers missing two or more workdays as a result of an injury or disease did not submit a claim. Equally troubling, they found overt or subtle action by the employer that fits the researcher's definition of **claim suppression**. Most recently, a team of IWH researchers **published findings** of an Ontario study suggesting upwards of 40 per cent of emergency department visits for the **treatment of work-related injuries or illnesses are not reported to the WSIB as required by law**. In June 2021, Dr. Cameron Mustard, then IWH president and senior scientist, explained "Somewhere between 40 and 60 per cent of potentially compensable conditions are typically not reported to provincial compensation authorities in Canada."

COVID-19 related claims are likely no different. As of April 12, 2023, the WSIB recognized 132 work-related deaths because of COVID exposures. Allowed lost-time COVID claims totalled more than 55,000. However, given the lack of access to testing throughout the pandemic and lack of clarity about workplace transmission these numbers are sure to only **represent a fraction of known cases**. But we do know outbreaks in Ontario health and care facilities continue to impact frontline workers, residents and patients. As of March 11, 2023, there are more than 150 ongoing COVID-19 outbreaks in Ontario long-term care facilities, retirement homes, congregate living settings and hospitals.

***By the Numbers:** [2022 WSIB Health and Safety Statistics](#) (Most recent annual data. This data was accessed April 12, 2023, on the WSIB web site).