

Safeguarding workers lives and livelihoods

# CLOSE TO HOME

**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 must stop.** On April 28, National Day of Mourning, and every day, we must remember and recognize ALL workers affected by uncontrolled hazards at work.

In their own words, the WSIB is one of the largest insurance organizations in North America. It is not an organization whose mission is to record the true toll of work-related injuries, illness, and death suffered by Ontario workers. In fact, the experiences of workers and their families, and a growing body of research evidence tells us **most deaths and many injuries and illnesses caused by hazardous work 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. And the same is likely true of mental injuries for instance, a significant and growing issue which is inadequately addressed in many workplaces and many sectors.

A more accurate picture of worker deaths, injuries, and illnesses must be prioritized and widely communicated to the public, government regulators, employers, and others. **Failure to shed light on the true toll of suffering serves only to downplay the collective need to pursue safer, healthier work.** Just as worker suffering strikes 'close to home', solutions can also be found close to home. Prevention efforts must begin in the workplace led by committed employers, competent supervisors and well-trained joint health and safety committees, worker trades committees and worker health and safety representatives where applicable. Though enhanced regulations and stronger regulatory enforcement is also critical in the pursuit of safer, healthier work – as is better reporting and recognition of worker injuries, illness and death. (See page 2, THE LAW).

## A TRUER TOLL

Conservative Estimates of Ontario Worker Suffering

Estimated 2023 worker deaths resulting from hazardous work.

2,940

\*WSIB-allowed 2023 worker death claims: 294

Estimated 2023 worker injuries and illnesses resulting from hazardous work.

357,924

\*WSIB-allowed 2023 worker injury and illness claims: 178,962

\*2023 WSIB Health and Safety Statistics

(This data was accessed March 13, 2025, on the [WSIB web site.](#))



## THE EVIDENCE

**Worker Deaths:** 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. Although, whether one multiplies by 10 or 13, the report concludes, even these are conservative estimates.

Other research has long supported this truth. A report by Dr. Annalee Yassi in 1983 first estimated 6,000 work-related deaths annually in Ontario from cancer, cardiovascular and pulmonary diseases alone (Occupational Disease and Worker Compensation in Ontario). A government commissioned study by Dr. Paul Demers, Occupational Cancer Research Centre director, published in 2020 found [less than 10 per cent of Ontarians with occupational cancer ever get compensated](#). Additional research evidence suggests between [five](#) and [16 per cent](#) of cancers are work-related. Based on this, and estimates provided by the [Canadian Cancer Society](#), between 1,635 and 5,232 Ontarians died in 2024 from work-related cancer.

**Worker Injuries and Illnesses:** In 2020, Ontario's Institute for Work and Health ([IWH](#)) published research finding 64 per cent of injuries go unreported to a workers' compensation board. Additional [IWH research](#) published in 2021 found more than half of British Columbia workers missing two or more workdays because of an injury or disease did not submit a claim. In 2022, [IWH researchers](#) published 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. Most recently, the Toronto Star reported on the lack of follow up for tens of thousands of reports filed with the WSIB by health care professionals treating patients who suffered an injury at work. The physician reports filed between 2019 and 2023 went unsupported by corresponding reports from employers and workers with the WSIB.

The literature on factors explaining underreporting and under recognition of injury and illness claims is just as rich. A [qualitative study conducted in 2009](#) and funded by the WSIB Research Advisory Council found a number of factors as they relate to occupational disease. Among these factors were a lack of education linking workplace hazards with their health effects, "tensions" between the science and adjudication policy, fear of employer reprisals, and financial incentives for underreporting. A subsequent [2023 landscape review of occupational disease](#) in Ontario among other things reminded us of legal requirements for reporting.

## THE LAW

**Employer Reporting Obligations:** Within three days of learning that a worker has suffered a workplace injury, illness, or fatality, the employer must report it to the [WSIB](#). A copy of the WSIB report must be provided to the worker. Employers also have [requirements](#) under the *Occupational Health & Safety Act (OHSA)* to notify the workplace joint health and safety committee (JHSC) or worker health and safety rep in smaller workplaces, trade union, if any, and Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

Not reporting an injury, illness or death to the WSIB or pressuring a worker to not report, abandon, or withdraw a claim, known as claim suppression, is an offence under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act (WSIA)*. Employers can face [administrative penalties](#) up to \$1,000 for not reporting. In addition, failing to comply with reporting obligations is an offence under the *WSIA*. Individuals may also be liable, on conviction, for a fine of up to \$25,000 or up to six months in jail, or both. A corporate entity, if convicted, may be fined up to \$500,000.

**Worker Reporting Obligations:** Workers should inform their supervisor or employer about any injury or illness they suffer because of work as soon as possible. They should also [file a claim with the WSIB](#) as soon as possible, but no more than six months after the incident or, in the case of an occupational disease, after the worker learns that he or she suffers from the disease [s. 22, *WSIA*]. A copy of the claim must be provided to the employer or the most recent employer with relevance to the occupational disease.