

Remembering those injured and killed on the job

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undreds of people gathered in front of the Vancouver Art Gallery April 28, the 25th annual National Day of Mourning, to honour all of the workers in British Columbia who lost their lives or were injured on the job.

-We are remembering sisters and brothers, friends, relatives and coworkers who were injured or killed unnecessarily on the job," said Bill Saunders, president of the Vancouver & District Labour Council. -I say unnecessarily because we know that not nearly enough is being done to prevent workplace accidents or injuries. We know that most, if not all, of them are preventable."

In 2008, 160 workers in BC were killed while on the job. To honour those lost, 300 people marched 160 coffins around the block and then carefully placed each coffin down in long rows in front of the steps of the gallery.

Unsafe work sites affect all professions. Health care work sites are no exception. Last year, three health care professionals died on the job and many people in the health care field are frequently faced with violence in their workplace, according to WorkSafeBC reports.

Yet, cases of violence against health care workers often go unreported.

-There is a history of health care workers thinking that they need to be heroic in some ways," said HSA president Reid Johnson. -When you are assaulted or threatened some people still have the idea that its part of the job. We have to change that culture and encourage people to think that violence is not necessarily part of the job."

Educating HSA members about their rights is one key to reducing violence towards health care professionals, said Johnson. But, regulations must be enforced in order to keep vulnerable health care workers safe.

-There also has to be enforcement. If people are not managing the way they are obligated to then WorkSafeBC and the like have to really enforce the regulations. Thats not happening," he said.

Speakers at the Day of Mourning rally emphasized the need for tougher government restrictions on employers, proper on-the-job training for employees, and an older minimum work age for young people.

Doug De Patie, father of Grant De Patie who was killed in March 2005 for trying to stop someone from stealing gas at the gas station he worked at, spoke about the difficulties he has faced trying to get more regulations that ensure employee safety.

-I thought [all] along that we were working with WorkSafeBC. I can see that we are obviously not working against them, but we are having to demand that they protect workers," De Patie said. 

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