

# IN 2010, UNIONS MAKE WORK SAFER!

For 28 April, 2010 the ITUC will be calling on its affiliates to place significant emphasis on the role trade unions play in improving occupational health and safety. Therefore, the suggested theme for 28 April 2010 is "Unions make work safer". We would like to encourage you to undertake your own research and provide examples from experiences in your workplaces, your legislative initiatives or your public actions.

## ACT LOCAL, BE GLOBAL!

Your reports are key for building a global day of action. Don't forget to send us your materials, news releases, photos, videos etc to [anabella.roseberg@ituc-csi.org](mailto:anabella.roseberg@ituc-csi.org). These will all be posted in our 28 April website, jointly coordinated with Hazards: <http://www.hazards.org/wmd/>

### FOLLOW UP 28 APRIL!

1. Get inspired by the Hazards website for 28 April
2. Use the Global Unions posters available in three languages at [www.hazards.org/wmd](http://www.hazards.org/wmd)
2. Report your activities to [anabella.roseberg@ituc-csi.org](mailto:anabella.roseberg@ituc-csi.org)
3. Join the ITUC electronic lists on OHS
4. Come back to us with ideas on how to build a stronger and broader 28 April!

### More information on trade unions and occupational health and safety?

HAZARDS (mainly in English)  
<http://hazards.org/>

ITUC website (search occupational health and safety) (in English, French and Spanish)  
<http://www.ituc-csi.org/>

Global Unions website (search occupational health and safety) (in English, French and Spanish)  
<http://www.global-unions.org/>

ETUI (in English and French)  
<http://hesa.etui-rehs.org/uk/default.asp>

Instituto Laboral Andino (ILA) (In Spanish)  
<http://www.ila.org.pe/>

TUC-UK (in English)  
[http://www.tuc.org.uk/h\\_and\\_s/index.cfm](http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/index.cfm)

ISTAS-CCOO (In Spanish)  
<http://www.istas.net/web/index.asp?idpagina=1233>



# TRADE UNIONS & OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

## WHAT IS 28 APRIL?



28 April is the International Commemoration Day, on which we remember workers who died, were injured or fell ill due to unsafe, unhealthy or unsustainable work and workplaces around the world. The most updated information shows that there are almost 360,000 fatal occupational accidents in any year, and almost 2 million fatal work-related diseases. Every day, more than 960,000 workers get hurt because of accidents and on average 5,330 workers die because of work-related diseases.<sup>1</sup> Since 1996 when the first such commemoration took place at the UN, the international labour movement has observed and promoted 28 April around the world. To date, some 20 countries and territories have officially recognised 28th April as the International Day for Dead and Injured Workers: Argentina, Belgium, Bermuda, Brazil, Canada, Dominican Republic, Greece, Luxembourg, Panama, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Taiwan, Ukraine and – the most recent addition – the United Kingdom, in addition to which

the Andean Community of countries has adopted 28 April on behalf of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and their associate member Venezuela.

### WHAT IS 28 APRIL FOR?

- to commemorate those who have lost their lives and their health at or because of their work
- to raise awareness about the risk of disease, injury or death for workers in all sectors and countries
- to engage all workers and unions in a positive action day for dialogue, transformation and progress on occupational health and safety.

1. Hämäläinen, P. et al., Global trend according to estimated number of occupational accidents and fatal work-related diseases at region and country level, Journal of Safety Research 40 (2009) 125–139. <http://osha.europa.eu/en/press/articles/global-trend-according-to-estimated-number-of-occupational-accidents-and-fatal-work-related-diseases-at-region-and-country-level>



# UNIONS MAKE WORK SAFER

## TRADE UNIONS ARE A CENTREPIECE IN BUILDING SAFER WORKPLACES.

All too often, current production systems are organized in such a way that workers are expected to absorb pressures for higher productivity by accepting less protection and more job insecurity, often risking their health and lives for a wage. Acting collectively to combat this through trade unions is a first step towards a safer workplace. In addition, scientific evidence and workers' perception show that when workers are represented by trade unions on occupational health and safety issues, their working environment is significantly better than where they are left alone with their concerns. Union action on occupational health is oriented towards risk elimination and control, and this basically means working on prevention. For years, unions have been working at the workplace to identify problems, raise awareness among workers, elaborate proposals, negotiate agreements, and verify their enforcement and efficiency.<sup>1</sup>

## 1 MAKING VISIBLE THE INVISIBLE: UNIONS IDENTIFY RISKS

- Unions' role is to bring some light to bear on what workers perceive as representing a risk or being a source of suffering in their daily lives at the workplace.<sup>2</sup> We are close to workers, we know the workplace, and so we are a key force for protecting them, their health and their future.
- Unions often realise the risks long before management. It was unions that highlighted the dangers of asbestos and campaigned for a ban many years before governments

1. ISTAS-CCOO, Guía del Delegado y Delegada de Prevención, 2007

2. ISTAS-CCOO, Guía del Delegado y Delegada de Prevención, 2007

introduced one. If action had been taken then, it could have prevented many of the 3,000 annual deaths that are caused by asbestos in the UK alone. Unions were the first to raise major concerns over levels of violence in the workplace, repetitive strain injuries (RSI), and the effects of passive smoking. When unions first raised the issue of stress, employers and the media argued it was nonsense; it is now recognised that workplace stress affects around half a million people.<sup>3</sup>

## 2 TURNING INDIVIDUAL PROBLEMS INTO COLLECTIVE SOLUTIONS: UNIONS INFORM AND TRAIN WORKERS

- Unions offer workers the opportunity to share their concerns with their colleagues and collectively discuss the health problems caused by their working conditions.
- Unions combat any tendency to tell workers that occupational injuries or diseases are just individual problems. Unions provide collective solutions to what needs to be considered a collective problem (an injury for one is an injury for all!).
- This can only be done if workers and their representatives can count on sufficient information and knowledge on occupational risks and their possible solutions. Unions are working hard throughout the world to train workplace OHS representatives and to pass and enforce ambitious legislation on OHS, and this has an impact on building safer workplaces!

3 TUC-UK, Union safety effect, 2004 [http://www.tuc.org.uk/h\\_and\\_s/tuc-8382-f0.cfm](http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/tuc-8382-f0.cfm) in Hazards 88 October-December 2004

## 3 FROM EVALUATION TO ACTION: UNIONS ORGANISE ACTIONS, EVALUATE THEM AND ENSURE FOLLOW UP.

- From workplace training to national or sectoral legislation, from strikes to collective bargaining, we can change things!
- Tell us your story!

## 4 IT IS ABOUT BUILDING A CULTURE OF PREVENTION!

- A safe workplace is central to building a culture of prevention in our societies, and it is towards this goal that our actions on 28th April are also oriented. A preventative culture needs us all: governments, employers and workers need to actively participate in securing a safe and healthy working environment through a system of defined rights, responsibilities and duties, and where the principle of prevention is accorded the highest priority.<sup>4</sup>
  - Therefore, union representatives need to be empowered with the rights already established in ILO Convention 155, as well as with new legislation in order to accompany the evolution of risks at the workplace.

4. Seoul Declaration on Safety and Health at Work, [http://www.seouldeclaration.org/documents/Seoul\\_Declaration\\_EN.pdf](http://www.seouldeclaration.org/documents/Seoul_Declaration_EN.pdf)

@ the workplace: workers and trade unionists save lives everyday through their workplace action. More information on what you can do at your workplace: <http://www.hazards.org/haz109/h109unioneffect.pdf>

@ the national level: Many unions have campaigned hard in their countries for new legislation on occupational health (such as in Argentina, where a new law for construction workers has just been passed, in New Zealand, where new OHS law provides statutory rights for worker participation in occupational health and safety, and in Spain, where the role of the risk prevention delegate in the workplace is now mandatory). In other countries, unions have fought for obtaining the ratification of ILO Convention 155 by their national governments (in the last two years alone Fiji, South Korea, Tajikistan, Syria and Bahrain have ratified it).

@ the regional level, the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) has developed a regional strategy on occupational health, and the International Trade Union Confederation – Africa is training national centres on chemicals management.

@ the international level, unions have organised global campaigns (the Building and Woodworkers' International has strengthened its efforts to achieve a global ban on asbestos, the Public Service International has developed guidelines on workplace violence and for protecting healthcare workers from HIV/AIDS, and many Global Union Federations have signed International Framework Agreements including clauses on OHS).

THROUGH OUR EFFORTS, 28 APRIL HAS BECOME THE BIGGEST HEALTH AND SAFETY EVENT IN THE WORLD!

