

Official recognition for workers memorial day in the UK

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The UK will officially recognise Workers Memorial Day to commemorate thousands of people who have died, been seriously injured or made ill through their work, Yvette Cooper announced today.

This follows the Government's consultation in July to explore options for official recognition of the day, which gained widespread support.

This year, the UK will join the many other countries around the world that officially recognise the Day on 28 April, the International Day of Action for Safety and Health at Work. Formal recognition will reinforce the significance of the Day and raise awareness of the number of people who are killed, disabled, injured or made unwell through their work.

Work and Pensions Secretary of State Yvette Cooper said:

"I am delighted to announce that the UK will officially recognise Workers Memorial Day. This is a tribute to all those who have campaigned long and hard, including bereaved families, trade unions, campaign groups, and many other organisations and individuals.

"For the first time, the UK will join countries across the globe in remembrance of all those killed at work and for the families they have left behind, and the many more who have been harmed. It is also a spur to greater efforts to improve health and safety for today's and tomorrow's working population."

While the UK has one of the best health and safety records in the world, official figures show that 180 people were killed at work last year and over 27,000 suffered major injury. Around 8,000 each year die from occupational cancers and lung diseases.

There have been an increasing number of commemorative events in the UK in recent years as Workers Memorial Day has become a focal point for bereaved families, unions, campaign organisations and local authorities among others. As more people have become involved in these events, there has been growing support for formal recognition of the Day.

Commemorations will continue to be led by individuals, employers, trade unions and community organisations. In keeping with the outcome of the consultation, the Government will encourage commemorations to be held on the day itself throughout the UK. The Government and Ministers will help support and promote these commemorations.

Notes to Editors

1. The Consultation is available on <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations/2009/>
2. Workers Memorial Day originated in Canada in 1984. The day is also recognised in other countries. It is now recognised as a national day in 19 countries.
3. Since 1989 trade unions in the UK, USA, Asia, Europe and Africa have organised events on and around 28 April. This date was chosen for International Workers Memorial Day as it is the anniversary of the Occupational Health and Safety Act in the USA and also commemorates the day that 28 people were killed in a construction accident in Connecticut.

4. Workers Memorial Day has been informally recognised in the UK since 1992.

5. In 2001 the International Labour Organisation recognised Workers Memorial Day and announced April 28 as an International Day of Action for Safety and Health at Work, which is an annual international campaign to promote safe, healthy and decent work around the globe.

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