

MEDIA ADVISORY – IMPACTS OF WORKPLACE INJURY RELEASED

The London & Middlesex Injured Workers & Repetitive Strain Injury Support & Information Group in conjunction with the London & District Labour Council released the Ontario Network of Injured Workers' Group (ONIWG) report on the impacts of workplace injury, particularly the poverty of injured workers at a Press Conference at London Occupational Safety & Health Information Services (LOSH), 797 York St., London on June 1st at 4 p.m.

The injured worker and labour communities including the London & Middlesex Injured Workers' & Repetitive Strain Injury Support & Information Group were joined by LOSH, LDLC, CAW Local 1520 and OPSEU Local 152 on June 1st for the 26th anniversary of Injured Workers' Day. The event highlighted the principle that injury should not mean poverty and celebrates their work together as a community.

Wendy Knelsen, the Facilitator of the London Injured Workers' Group advised of some of the key findings of the report, which included:

- Injured workers experience nearly 4 times the rate of poverty for Ontario.
- 1 in 5 workers lost their home after injury
- Incidence of subsidized housing more than doubled after injury
- 1 in 5 workers are on social assistance after injury
- 1 in 5 workers are living in extreme poverty post-injury (less than \$10,000 per year. In fact, 41% reported an income of less than \$15,000/year
- The report found a 13 fold increase in food bank usage post-injury
- ¼ of injured workers lost their car
- 61% of injured workers were unemployed after injury; prior to injury 89% were employed full time
- Almost half (46%) reported depression as a result of their workplace injury and ¾ of the local group have considered suicide
- 2/3 of IWs reported losing friends and 18% have lost family due to strained relationships

Patti Dalton, President of the London District Labour Council stated “the Network (Ontario Network of Injured Workers' Groups) did this research out of necessity because the government has not and we need to ask why the McGuinty Government is not engaging in this research which is so primary for determining the needs of injured workers. I suggest to you that it is because increasingly they don't want to bring attention to the many ways in which their government is failing Ontarians. It's a part of their political manouvering to avoid accountability for the fact that there has been a systemic erosion of critical services of all kinds.”

Chad O'Halloran, Executive Director of London Occupational Safety & Health Information Services stated “injured workers are not being taken care of – the system that was created to protect them is letting them down. The most alarming statistic to me is that while 95% of respondents reported they sustained an injury at work, only 55% indicate that they are receiving money from the WSIB. That is approximately half of the injured workers polled!” Chad also advised the attendees that “every day three Canadians go to work and do not come home; and

close to a million workers each year come home changed due to an injury. They receive no national media attention. They are then neglected by the system that was put in place to protect them! Something needs to be done.”

Dennis McGee, President of CAW Local 1520 said “the Workers’ Compensation System has developed an incentive system designed to hide injuries and benefits have been reduced while injured workers have come under greater pressure from employers. More & more workers are choosing not to file Workers’ Compensation claims in fear of the beurocracy of the system and the power of employers to either humiliate them back to work or send them back to the employment lines.

Irene Matthyssen, MP London Fanshawe, who was unable to attend but sent a message to the Media conference said “Too often instead of support, workers are faced with complicated processes involving government foot dragging, long waiting lists for physiotherapy, specialist reviews, diagnostic tests, and endless red tape. WSIB stats show regularly 22% of all initiated claims are either denied or abandoned. This represents 70,000 attempts by workers to access our compensation system – nearly 8 per hour of every working day.”

Wendy Knelsen also advised the attendees that “Injured workers have not forgotten our history – the system was set up to save employers from lawsuits, but in exchange, workers were guaranteed “full justice, not ½ measures” as outlined by the Founder Sir William Meredith. We are calling on the government, WSIB Chair Stephen Mahoney, Minister of Labour, Peter Fonseca to do the following on the Road to Justice:

- Address injured worker poverty by eliminating deeming and fully adjusting workers’ compensation to keep up with inflation
- Extend workers’ compensation coverage to protect all workers – we need universal coverage as well as coverage for all occupational diseases, from both physical hazards and occupational stresses
- Every province and territory must have an Act that has a clear focus to assist workers with a permanent disability – not an insurance system to protect employers. End the Experience Rating program that rewards employers who fail to report workplace injuries and drains hundreds of millions of dollars from the system every year
- Restore the independence of the Appeals Tribunal from WCB/WSIB policy, independence that existed by the law prior to the Harris government
- As the Canadian Labour Congress outlined in their bulletin, “Dignity, respect and justice must be the foundation for a renewed workers’ compensation system” & “Injured Workers deserve a pension for life if workplace injuries result in a disability for life.”
- Injured workers deserve full cost of living protection.
- Injured workers need real jobs (not phantom jobs after quick LMR training program and they need job security or else FULL compensation

For further details, you may reach Wendy Knelsen at 519-433-4156 (LOSH) or 519-637-0882 (home). Patti Dalton may be reached at 519-452-2640 (work) and 519-659-4301 (home). For a copy of the “Impacts of Workplace Injury” poverty survey report, you may go to the injured workers online website: <http://www.injuredworkersonline.org/Activities/June12009.html>

