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# Health and Safety: a matter of life or death

Every year more people are killed at work than in wars. Most don't die of mystery ailments, or in tragic "accidents", they die because an employer decided not to prioritise health and safety measures in their workplace.

**International Workers' Memorial Day** commemorates workers killed at work and has been officially recognised in the UK since 2010.

While many PCS members are fortunate to work in relatively safe places, according to the [November 2023 report by the International Labour Organisation](#), the latest global estimate for work-related accidents and diseases nears 3 million. 2.6 million deaths are attributed to work-related diseases and 330,000 to fatal accidents. This represents a more than 5% increase compared to 2015. Each of these fatalities could and should have been preventable, and the cost in terms of human suffering is incalculable.

That's why PCS believes we should use Workers' Memorial Day to highlight the need for strong regulation at a national, European and global level. We need to address the issue of companies benefitting from the lack of health and safety standards, and put a stop to those politicians who brand H&S as a burden on business.

This year the theme for Workers' Memorial Day is **Climate Change and Occupational Safety**. Changing climates increase risks to outdoor workers, as new chemicals are introduced in various industries to tackle, for example, crop failure or fire prevention, without exposure levels being set up. Climate related H&S risks also include increasing UV radiation which can lead to cataracts, eye

diseases and skin cancers. Instances of lung disease are increasing as workers are exposed to more and more pollution.

Decent H&S protections are not just a matter for social justice, they are a matter of life or death. There should be no further dilution of health and safety regulation and enforcement, and we oppose the current government's pro-employer and anti-worker policies.

It has been found that workplaces that have union safety reps with an active health and safety committee, have half the major injury rate of organisations that don't have these structures.

Safety reps play an enormously positive role in society. In 2016, research found that safety reps in the UK saved between £219 million to £725 million by reducing lost time caused by injury and illness.

So what can you do? Make sure that you have a H&S rep in your workplace, and that your employer has a H&S committee designed to tackle workplace health issues. PCS has a great network of H&S reps, and we encourage anyone who is interested to volunteer to become one. Comprehensive training is available and there is still a statutory right to paid time off to carry out both the training and the regular H&S Rep' duties.

As the Workers' Memorial Day message states, let's all remember the dead and fight for the living.

If you'd like to help make your workplace safer for your colleagues, contact [healthandsafety@pcs.org.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@pcs.org.uk) or talk to [your union rep](#).