



HEU recognizes Day of Mourning and joins call for public inquiry into fatal sawmill disasters

On April 28, HEU is joining with unions across the country to mark Canada's International Day of Mourning, which remembers and honours workers injured or killed on the job, and those who have died from worker-related illnesses.

And this year, HEU is also supporting the B.C. Federation of Labour's renewed call for an independent public inquiry into the 2012 Lakeland and Babine sawmill explosions. Those two fatal disasters killed four workers and injured others.

As health care workers, HEU members have one of the highest injury rates in the province. And of those, care aides working in long-term care have the highest injury rates, with more than 50 per cent reporting that they've been injured on the job.

Those statistics were reflected in a recent poll of HEU care aides, which also pointed out that 80 per cent of those surveyed had experienced some form of violence on the job.

"The injury rates in health care are staggering. Behind these numbers are real people whose lives and livelihoods are deeply impacted by unsafe working conditions," says HEU secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside.

"It's time for government and its health authorities to recognize that short-staffing and understaffing are a root cause of many preventable injuries in health care."

Whiteside says toxic stress, overexertion, violence, and slips and falls are all leading occupational hazards that are often caused directly, or indirectly, by not having enough people on shift to do the job safely.

In recent months, the union's OH&S department has been holding workshops on the workload issue. And recently, HEU's top leadership and key staff participated in a provincial summit to address violence prevention in health care.

Time lost to acts of violence disproportionately impacts health care workers, and are especially high in long-term care. In fact, over the last five years, care aides in B.C. lost nearly 80,000 days from work due to violence-related injuries, more than twice number lost by RNs.

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