

Statements by Ministers

The Code requires that employers make employees aware of all known or foreseeable hazards in the workplace. Workers have the right to refuse dangerous work. Workers also have the right and responsibility to participate in identifying and solving job-related safety and health problems as members of safety and health committees, or as safety and health representatives. Needless to say, they play a key role in furthering safety and health issues. We should not become safety conscious only after accidents occur. Prevention has to be foremost in our minds. While laws, regulations and Governments play an important role in accident prevention, in the final analysis, it is the employers and workers who are responsible for preventing, eliminating or controlling hazards in the workplace.

• (1250)

This is a responsibility which no one can shun. Only through awareness can Canadian workers significantly improve occupational safety and health in the workplace.

[*Translation*]

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the Government encourages cooperation and seeks consensus; we constantly try to find new ways to give workers and employers the tools they need to prevent accidents in the workplace, as well as occupational injuries and illnesses.

Last October, the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System came into effect. This system was created as a result of a joint effort by the federal Government, provincial and territorial governments, unions and employers.

WHMIS is a very important information system, one of the most advanced of its kind in the world. Its purpose is to identify hazardous substances used on the job and to standardize their labeling. Since it took effect, this system requires suppliers to specify the dangers involved with substances produced or imported in Canada that are used in Canadian workplaces. Furthermore, the system requires suppliers to transmit data sheets to employers who in turn must inform employees.

Today as a society we are greatly concerned with our environment and its impact on public health. In the same way, we must be aware of our working environment. We must ensure that our economic progress and growth are not at the expense of our workers' lives and health.

The federal Government is always looking out for new regulatory approaches that would enable it, in cooperation with its partners, to make the workplace safer for workers.

Much remains to be done, but there is a glimmer of hope on the horizon. In the last ten years, the work accident rate has gone from one worker in eight to one in ten, an average reduction of 17 per cent. This improvement is modest but encouraging.

[*English*]

As we have witnessed in the past, having all interested parties involved in occupational safety and health, is the only real way to ensure progress and change in the workplace. In the years to come we must all be part of the continuing effort to make needed changes happen. Each and every one of us in our respective roles must contribute to reducing the suffering caused by work related accidents and illnesses.

Mr. George Proud (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to those people who have been killed or injured in the workplace. As we know, many, many accidents have taken place over the years. Accidents that, by today's standards, show were great acts of carelessness.

As has been stated, April 28 has been designated as the labour movement's national day of mourning. The day is set aside to commemorate Canadian workers who have been killed or injured in the workplace. This date was chosen because it coincides with the passing of the first compensation law in Canada. It is important to note that, with the adoption of the Canada Labour Code in 1968, occupational health and safety concerns are now more protected than they ever were before. The objective of this was to reduce and ultimately eliminate job-related accidents. Since the adoption of this legislation the safety of the workplace has greatly improved. But I can say, and everyone knows, that much more is to be done. We now see occupational health and safety acts in place through the country. We still see great discrepancies. Many accidents and much illness still abound in the