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Workers' Memorial Day is reminder of daily risks faced by workers, says TUC

International Workers' Memorial Day (Tuesday, 28 April) serves as a reminder to workers across the globe that many of them are at daily risk of accidents, injury and illness at work, says the TUC.

The event is an international annual day of remembrance and action for workers killed, disabled and injured by their work.

This year marks the 23rd year that it has been commemorated in the UK and falls just days after the second anniversary of the Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh. In April 2013, almost 1200 workers, most of them young women, lost their lives when the factory building collapsed.

The theme of this year's International Workers' Memorial Day is removing exposure to hazardous substances. To coincide with this theme, the TUC is highlighting the results of an online questionnaire on hazardous substances at work, filled in by 500 people.

Of the respondents, 71 per cent said they are exposed to, or at risk from, potentially dangerous substances at work. This included asbestos (49 per cent), hazardous chemicals and gases (49 per cent), radiation sources (35 per cent) and biological agents such as bacteria, fungi, viruses and other pathogens (27 per cent). Asbestos alone is responsible for 5,000 UK deaths a year.

TUC General Secretary **Frances O'Grady** said: "The people who completed our questionnaire are a reminder that many workers in the UK are exposed to a range of hazardous substances. For some it is on a daily basis, and the result has been thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands of people suffering ill health.

"Yet every single one of these cases could be prevented. Many of these substances could be removed from the workplace or their use reduced, but where this is not possible, workers need much better protection. That means stronger regulation, and, more importantly, proper enforcement.

"On International Workers' Memorial Day in workplaces across the world and in the UK, trade union health and safety representatives will consider what can be

done to stop unnecessary deaths, injuries and illness. We need employers and governments to do more too.

“The appalling loss of life that resulted from the Rana Plaza collapse shows just what can happen when workers do not get the health and safety protection they need at work. It was a tragic reminder that complacency about health and safety is deadly.”

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- International Workers' Memorial Day is an international day of remembrance and action for workers killed, disabled, injured or made ill by their work. Since 2010 it has been officially recognised by the UK government. In addition to union activities, it is marked by safety campaigners, professional bodies, the HSE and local authorities. For details of local events go to: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/WMD2015>

- Respondents who took part in the online questionnaire were directed to it from the TUC website, Risks magazine and by trade union representatives. There was a total of 533 respondents, with the main sectors represented being central and local government (30%), energy and water (13%), transport and communications (13%), manufacturing (12%) and other services (15%).

- For the latest annual HSE regional statistics on fatalities at work go to: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/>

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