

Media Release: Rail and Maritime Transport Union
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Workers' Memorial Day: Mourn the dead, fight for the living

Today's Workers Memorial Day commemorations would be particularly moving, the Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) said today.

Workers' Memorial Day was first observed in 1989 in Canada, and now on April 28 each year hundreds of communities and worksites around the world honour those who have died or been injured at work.

"This year's memorial day will be especially poignant," said RMTU General Secretary Wayne Butson, who is speaking at a Workers Memorial Day event in Mount Maunganui today.

"Today our thoughts and prayers are with the families of the 29 Pike River miners, the 172 who died and the many hundreds who were injured in the Canterbury earthquakes and of course the unimaginable suffering in Northern Japan."

Wayne Butson said that decades of struggle by workers and their unions have resulted in significant improvements in working conditions today, but despite this, the toll of workplace injuries, illnesses and deaths remain unacceptably high.

"Workplace accidents are preventable. This is a waste and a loss that can never be truly compensated for. For every workplace death there are truly dozens who suffer."

"In addition to those who die on the job, many workers leave for work and return home, but carry with them hidden time bombs of occupational disease, estimated to kill between 700 and 1,000 annually," he said.

Wayne Butson said that 27 RMTU rail and port members had been killed at work since 1994.

"This is a day when workers and management alike must make a commitment to change our attitudes and behaviours."

"We must all swear to protect and look after our fellow worker. We must all learn to find it acceptable to challenge and to be challenged if we see or do an unsafe act."

Ends.

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