International Workers Memorial Day 2019

Speech at Blackburn ceremony by Julie Rigby

According to the HSE a total of 144 workers were killed at work in Great Britain in 2017/2018 – this is an increase of 9 on the previous year.

Statistics also show that the rate of fatal injuries increase with age, with workers 60 – 64 having a rate more than double the all ages rate, and workers aged 65 and over a rate of around five times greater than the all ages rate.

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 their safety just wasn't that important a priority.

Up to 50,000 people die each year in the UK from work-related ill health and accidents. This has the knock on effect on families and the wider community which is why Health and safety in our workplaces is vital. Whether it is a hospital, school or care home, our elderly and vulnerable relatives, our children and our communities should also be protected by measures intended to keep everyone safe from harm.

Workplaces where there are active trade union safety reps are twice as safe as those without. We need to keep up the campaign for better conditions to make our workplaces safer and healthier and together we can challenge bad employers and work with good ones.

There were 19 fatalities in the North West region alone in 2017 to 2019 – let us remember the following:

- Colin Willoughby aged 42 (came into contact with machinery)
- Christopher Bevan aged 53 (fell from height)
- Christopher Boon aged 47 (struck by an object)
- Rhona Wilson aged 56 (died following a fall)
- Peter Jobling aged 73 (struck by an object)
- Thomas Green aged 77 (fell from height)
- Henry Willis aged 20 (fell from height)
- Ronald Lowe aged 61 (struck by overturning vehicle)
- Andrew Tibbott aged 48 (struck by an object)
- Richard Bray aged 50 (came into contact with electricity)
- Marius Andrus aged 34 (fell from height)
- Paul Andrews aged 52 (struck by an object)
- Lee Grundy aged 37 (trapped by collapsed object)
- Anthony Geldard aged 63 (fell from height)
- Malcolm Woodman aged 61 (fell from height)
- Martin Leverton aged 70 (crushed by cattle)
- Michael Murray aged 69 (trapped by collapsed object)
- Stephen Wohler aged 58 (exposed to harmful substance)

Julie followed her speech by reading the following poem by Don Merrell.
I Chose to Look the Other Way

I could have saved a life that day,
But I chose to look the other way.
It wasn’t that I didn’t care,
I had the time, and I was there.
But I didn’t want to seem a fool,
Or argue over a safety rule.
I knew he’d done the job before,
If I spoke up, he might get sore.
The chances didn’t seem that bad,
I’d done the same, He knew I had.
So I shook my head and walked on by,
He knew the risks as well as I.
He took the chance, I closed an eye,
And with that act, I let him die.
I could have saved a life that day,
But I chose to look the other way.
Now every time I see his wife,
I’ll know, I should have saved his life.
That guilt is something I must bear,
But it isn’t something you need share.
If you see a risk that others take,
That puts their health or life at stake.
The question asked, or thing you say,
Could help them live another day.
If you see a risk and walk away,
Then hope you never have to say,
I could have saved a life that day,
But I chose, to look the other way.