

# WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY – PUBLIC CONSULTATION.

## GMB Response.

GMB represents over 600,000 members across a diverse number of industries in both the public and private sectors. In addition GMB has thousands of Safety Representatives who individually, and collectively, play a key role in improving workplace health, safety and welfare.

Many of these representatives, along with GMB members holding no official union positions, already mark Workers Memorial Day in a variety of ways right across the UK.

GMB has campaigned over a decade for there to be greater official note taken of Workers Memorial Day, which has been relatively well established in many areas despite its unofficial status. We recognise that the call for a public holiday made by campaigners in the past may be flawed on two counts.

First, while still advocating extra public holidays for British workers, we agree that there is a logistical problem with the date falling on April 28<sup>th</sup>, between two existing public holidays, namely Easter and May Day.

Secondly the designation of a public holiday would not necessarily be appropriate for a day for which the slogan “Remember the dead- Fight for the living” is highly appropriate.

However GMB does welcome the Government’s consultation on this issue, as we see that greater awareness on some of this issues highlighted by commemorating the day could help in workplaces across many industries. The dual nature of the day helps put into perspective the memory of the deceased and the campaigning for better health, safety and welfare in existing work places.

GMB would like the following comments to the questions posed to be taken into account.

### *1. Do you agree that the UK should officially recognise Workers Memorial Day?*

GMB believes that there is a strong case for official recognition of the day. While we appreciate the work that HSE and other enforcers carry out in the workplace GMB feels that complacency often arises as many only evaluate the safety performance across the UK by the statistical deaths at work figures. It is widely acknowledged that possibly over 1,000 workers die as a result of work related road traffic accidents – no one can say for sure what the real figure is, and those whose circumstances fall under other regulators such as Civil Aviation Authority are not included.

In addition those dying from “long-tail” exposure to chemicals and toxic carcinogens, such as asbestos, dwarf the official statistics and may not register as being caused from exposure at work, as those affected often die during sickness absence or during retirement. The true figures are almost certainly in the tens of thousands and Workers Memorial Day can play its’ part in raising awareness on these important areas.

*2. Do you agree that official recognition should take effect from 28<sup>th</sup> April 2010?*

Yes – GMB believes that by starting in 2010 acknowledges that the government considers the commemorating of the day as an important event.

*3. Do you agree that, with a view to promoting UK-wide involvement in Workers Memorial Day, a different UK region should lead on the commemorations each year?*

No – GMB believe that the focus on local, workplace and area events reflects best the nature of the event. It would be appropriate for all towns and cities to hold events on the day. As a UK wide day there should be encouragement of the devolved administrations to ensure that the impact of the day did not diminish with distance from the capital. There is more likely to be a growth in activity if there is ownership at local level and by changing the focus on an annual basis to a regional led event this could reduce the potential for growing awareness.

*4. Do you believe that government sponsored websites- such as BusinessLink and Directgov- should be used to promote Workers Memorial Day each year and publicise details of commemorative events?*

Yes – the day should be highlighted and promoted through all appropriate government websites including HSE, DWP and No 10 sites. These should have links to the TUC, trade union and Hazards sites which may well carry local information.

*5. Do you agree that government should encourage workplace commemorations of Workers Memorial Day, each year, in manners appropriate to individual workplaces?*

As it is workplaces, outside of the road traffic accident issue, where exposure to industrial hazard and risk occur they are the most appropriate arena in which to recognise and acknowledge Workers Memorial Day. This could be done by holding a minutes silence at noon, collective meetings, such as of the health and safety committee, or mass canteen meetings.

*6. Do you agree that the government should, where appropriate, encourage commemoration to be held on the nearest Saturday to workers Memorial Day?*

No- the day should be fixed as 28<sup>th</sup> April and the workplace should be the focus of events. By using the nearest Saturday this would only confuse matters. In addition, while UK working patterns in terms of days and hours worked have changed over the past 25 years the majority of workers still work a Monday to Friday pattern and by taking the emphasis away from the workplace by holding the day on a Saturday would diminish the impact of the day's events.

*7. Do you agree that Government Ministers should be actively involved in commemorating Workers Memorial Day each year?*

GMB is ambivalent on this question. Where events are held in the public arena, such as a church service, a march or tree planting then if ministers were invited then that would be up to local organisers of the events. Workplace based events should be a matter for the employer and employees to agree. Ministers could at least acknowledge the day by wearing the purple ribbons associated with the day.

*8. Have you any other proposals for marking Workers Memorial Day?*

Local councils have an important role to play in local communities and often need to demonstrate a lead to other employers. Flying flags at half mast, with accompanying publicity and information on why could help encourage other public bodies (NHS) and private organisations to follow suit. Government and devolved administrations should also do this accompanied by a minutes silence at noon.

We would also wish to see official recognition of Workers' Memorial Day through it's inclusion in official diaries and calendars, and by references to the day in any official publications or speeches delivered on 28<sup>th</sup> April.

## **Conclusion.**

GMB feels that the formal recognition of Workers Memorial Day is long overdue and that this consultation should be acted upon as soon as possible. There are little or no ongoing costs involved in implementation of these measures but they could help begin to address some of the issues around workplace health and safety. GMB are grateful for the opportunity to express our views and trust that they will be looked at progressively.

If there are any queries on any aspects of this response please contact either–  
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