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Steelworkers Support Better Return-to-Work Outcomes for Injured/Disabled Workers

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IN BRIEF

The USW has signed a licence agreement with an international council to help workers and workplaces achieve better return-to-work outcomes for injured workers and workers with disabilities.

TORONTO – The United Steelworkers (USW) has signed an agreement with an international council to help workers and workplaces achieve better return-to-work outcomes for injured workers and workers with disabilities.

"The Steelworkers have a long and proud history of standing by our members who are injured or living with disabilities, having launched many innovative projects to ensure these workers maintain their rightful place in society. Signing this agreement is another example of our ongoing commitment," said Ken Neumann, USW National Director.

The agreement, signed by the USW with the International Disability Management Standards Council (IDMSC) allows workers and employers to access an internationally adopted return-to-work (RTW) self-assessment tool (DMSA).

Grounded in jointly developed critical RTW practices and policies and initially developed as a major effort between a number of large Canadian employers and unions, the self-assessment report provides a confidential and general overview of a workplace's current RTW processes and a summary of 39 RTW practices usually considered essential for any effective return-to-work/disability management program.

Neumann signed the licence agreement with the IDMSC for the use of the Disability Management Self-Assessment Tool (DMSA) to help with return to work.

"In May, we commemorated the 20th anniversary of a terrible Canadian workplace tragedy, the Westray mine explosion. But with over 1,000 workers killed annually in Canada, and the recent explosions at two sawmills in British Columbia where four Steelworkers were tragically killed, these devastating accidents continue," said Neumann.

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"However, we must not forget that for every worker killed through an industrial accident or disease, not counting non-industrial injuries and illnesses, 20 workers suffer permanent physical or mental impairments, often forever affecting every aspect of their lives," Neumann said.

A sad reality across Canada and around the world is that suffering a permanent physical or mental impairment also means the loss of gainful employment and all too many times, injured/disabled workers are pushed to the margins of society.

Steelworkers were instrumental in assisting the International Labour Organization (ILO) in the development of the world's first Code of Practice on Managing Disabilities in the Workplace.

Officially launched by the ILO in 2002, and a workplace obligation for effective return-to-work programs and practices, the ILO code is now contained in the new United Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by Canada's Parliament in 2010.

"We have an absolute obligation to ensure that injured/disabled workers can maintain employment, continue to support their families and rebuild all-too-often shattered lives. I hope that access to this RTW guide will assist in that process," said Neumann.