

RED DEER ADVOCATE



The Red Deer Labour Council was among the groups that laid wreaths at Tuesday's Bower Place commemoration of workers who lost their lives on the job. Brad Vonkeman, chair of the Parkland Regional Safety Committee, and Red Deer councillor and bagpiper Buck Buchanan look on. (Photo by LANA MICHELIN/Advocate staff).

Red Deerians gather to remember the 165 Albertans killed in workplace fatalities last year

'We still have more work to do,' says safety committee chair

[LANA MICHELIN](#) / Apr. 28, 2020 12:50 p.m. / [LOCAL NEWS](#) / [NEWS](#)

The spread of COVID-19 reinforces the need to improve all aspects of workplace safety, says Brad Vonkeman.

Vonkeman, chair of the Parkland Regional Safety Committee, was among 11 people who gathered at Bower Ponds on Tuesday to observe a moment of silence in memory of the 165 Albertans who died on the job in 2019.

Workplace fatalities have stayed fairly consistent in the province despite growing efforts to raise awareness about the need to improve safety standards and practices, said Vonkeman.

"It concerns us.... It presents a challenge," said Vonkeman, whose group educates on workplace safety. According to the Association for Workers Compensation Boards of Canada, construction is by far the most dangerous occupation.

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When 188 Albertans were killed on the job in 2013 — the province's most fatal year on record — 76 per cent of labour deaths happened on construction sites, followed by manufacturing, government services, mining, quarrying and oil-related sites.

Although the former NDP government introduced new health and safety rules for farm workers, and larger construction firms have been implementing safety protocols that follow provincial legislation, some businesses are still not doing enough to protect workers, said Vonkeman.

“Some smaller companies either don't know the legislation, or maybe they think it's too expensive to implement.” The health risks posed by the coronavirus necessitate a whole new level of safety practices, he said.

Vonkeman urges business owners to ensure there's at least two metres of physical distancing space between workers, or the use of masks if this spacing isn't possible.

Employees also need to be able to wash or sanitize their hands frequently. If they aren't feeling well, they should be encouraged to stay home, he said.

Vonkeman works for a commercial boiler systems company that has strict rules in place to protect employees and customers.

Before he enters a new site, Vonkeman said he tells clients what social distancing protocols are expected, to ensure both parties will be protected.

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