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P R E S S R E L E A S E

Breaking the Stigma of Mental Illness in the Workplace

**Health & Safety Canada 2009 presents
“Forum on Mental Health” and “Guarding Minds @ Work”**

Toronto, Ontario – April 7, 2009 – Mental health in the workplace is emerging as one of the most challenging issues for employers. On Monday, April 20, 2009, **Health & Safety Canada 2009** puts the spotlight on this topic when **IAPA** presents the **Forum on Mental Health** and features the launch of **Guarding Minds @ Work**. Breaking the stigma of mental illness as a character weakness is the goal of the **Forum on Mental Health**, to be presented from 1:45 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. **Guarding Minds @ Work**, to be launched at 11:15 a.m., is a breakthrough resource developed by leading Canadian mental health researchers that gives employers tools to identify and help address mental health issues in their particular workplace.

At the **Forum on Mental Health**, a panel of mental health advocates will explore how the military and Veteran Affairs made mental health a management and operational priority for the Canadian Armed Forces, breaking the stigma of mental illness as a character weakness. Additionally, the panel will focus on the issue of workplace stress and mental illness and outline how employers can help defuse the soaring economic and human costs associated with mental illness.

Mental illness often strikes people in their prime working years and its effects on the workplace and the Canadian economy are staggering. Experts estimate that mental health problems now exceed \$50 billion a year, according to a study by Dr. Carolyn Dewa of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto. According to The Canadian Institutes of Health Research, statistics show that mental illness affects one in five Canadians. Of the 10 leading causes of disability worldwide, five are mental disorders. The three most common mental illnesses affecting people today are depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. A study by the Harvard School of Public Health found that if current trends persist, depression will cause more human disability and early deaths by 2020 than war, cancer, traffic accidents, and AIDS combined.

The Honourable Michael Kirby, Chair, Mental Health Commission of Canada and the Honourary Chair of Health & Safety Canada 2009 will moderate the **Forum on Mental Health**. The panel of speakers will inform conference delegates about the four pillars of the Canadian Armed Forces' program – peer support, family support, return to work, and leadership – and how these four elements have enabled them to reduce the stigma of mental illness. The speakers will also lay out the challenges of dealing with a mental health crisis in this country, and some strategies for delegates to implement into their workplaces.

The panel includes:

- **Major General Walter Semianiw**, Chief Military Personnel, Department of National Defence
- **Brian D. Ferguson**, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy, Programs and Partnerships, Veterans Affairs Canada
- **Maureen C. Shaw**, President & CEO, IAPA
- **Jayson Myers**, President and CEO, Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters

According to **IAPA** President and CEO Maureen Shaw, "Workplaces are not only affected by mental illness, they can cause mental health issues. Job demands and/or little control over the workplace can contribute - the more we learn about mental health at work, the more we recognize its role in promoting and conversely undermining, the safety, health, and productivity of our workplaces, especially now due the global economic crisis."

IAPA works with organizations to assess the leadership factors and/or management practices that could be contributing to mental harm or injury among their employees. Interventions are designed around three integrated principles: organizational culture, physical health and safety measures (the physical work environment), and personal health resources to assist organizations with finding ways to support their best assets – their people, by creating a healthy workplace culture. By offering employers the tools to deal with the prevention of mental harm or injury in their workplaces, through consulting interventions, workshops, and psychosocial risk management workshops, **IAPA** focuses on mental injury prevention, as well as awareness and education, not diagnosis or treatment.

Many workplaces are not equipped to recognize and address mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression on the job. Andrew Harkness, Senior Strategy Advisor, Healthy Workplaces, **IAPA**, states, "Employers should recognize that not only does poor mental health among their employees drain productivity, creativity, initiative, and resilience, but certain workplace practices can actually contribute to employee mental harm or injury by contributing to a toxic organizational culture. Employers must play a role in recognizing and understanding psychosocial hazards and the signs of mental illness. They must provide the help, resources, and hope for workers, and reduce the stigma attached to it."

Also addressing the issue of workplace mental health concerns is a new resource called **Guarding Minds @ Work**, which will be launched at **Health & Safety Canada 2009**. **Guarding Minds @ Work** has been developed by leading Canadian mental health researchers and is a resource that Canadian employers can use to proactively and effectively identify and help address mental health issues that may be affecting their workplace. **Guarding Minds @ Work** has been commissioned and funded by Great-West Life, a leading group insurance provider in Canada.

IAPA's Health & Safety Canada 2009 Conference and Trade Show, the largest event of its kind in Canada, will be held at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, South Building, from April 20 – 22, 2009. Through its theme – **Imagine. Innovate. Inspire.** – IAPA's 92nd annual event takes a dynamic, forward-thinking approach to health and safety challenges facing today's evolving workplaces and explores the building blocks needed to achieve positive change.

Canada's premier health and safety event will include three days of celebrated keynote speakers, leading-edge sessions, workshops, and professional development courses. Two trade shows and one feature area covering over 200,000 square feet and 500 exhibitors will run during the first two days of conference, April 20 – 21. In addition to the **Forum on Mental Health**, an additional event – **Leadership Summit 2009** – will focus on the DNA of a winning culture.

IAPA (Industrial Accident Prevention Association) is a not-for-profit, member-driven organization operating in Ontario since 1917. Representing approximately 50,000 member firms and more than 1.5 million Ontario workers, **IAPA** is Canada's leader in workplace health, safety, and employee well-being. **IAPA** is focused on providing industry-leading training, consulting, educational products, and informational services that meet our members' needs and the needs of those in their communities. **IAPA** is also recognized as a World Health Organization Collaborating Centre in Occupational Health and an International Labour Organization – CIS Collaborating Centre. **IAPA** is ISO 9001 certified, has been awarded the NQI PEP[®] Level 4 for Quality Certificate, and the Canada Awards for Excellence Gold Trophy Awards for both Quality and Healthy Workplace. For more information on IAPA's programs, products, services, and awards programs, visit IAPA's website at www.iapa.ca.

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