



**April 28th, 2012**

**Workers' Memorial Day Statement  
by  
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In the United States, Canada, and many other countries worldwide, Workers' Memorial Day is when we remember and honor our fallen Brothers and Sisters in the labor movement. It is a time to look back and mourn for workers killed and injured on the job, as well as a time to look ahead and rededicate ourselves to the fight for safe workplaces.

Last year, many working men and women throughout the United States and Canada, including Teamster members, were killed and injured on the job due to unsafe conditions. On behalf of all 1.4 million Teamster members, I ask that each of you take a few minutes on April 28th and remember these workers.

Forty-one years ago, Congress passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act, promising every worker the right to a safe job. Decades of struggle by workers and their Unions have resulted in significant improvements in working conditions. Unions have won laws and protections that have made workplaces safer for all workers. Union contracts have also given workers a voice on the job.

Nonetheless, the toll of workplace injuries, illnesses, and deaths remains enormous. Under 21 industrial divisions that include virtually every occupation imaginable, both professional and non-professional, private sector and public sector, some groups of Teamster members are particularly at risk, suffering very high rates of job injuries and fatalities. Highway incidents continue to be the leading cause of on-the-job fatalities, and truck drivers suffer more on-the-job fatalities than any other individual occupation. Ergonomic hazards cripple and injure hundreds of thousands of workers every year and musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) cases continue to increase and remain the nation's biggest workplace safety and health problem, without corresponding standards to prevent them.

Hispanic and immigrant workers, who often work in the most dangerous jobs and are exploited by employers, have no union protections and are afraid to speak out. Many public sector workers also have no OSHA protection. Hundreds of workers are fired or harassed by their employers each year simply for voicing job-safety concerns or reporting injuries. Although there are dozens of whistleblower protection and anti-retaliation laws on the books, some are simply too weak and others are just not aggressively enforced due to insufficient funding of the regulatory agencies charged with enforcement. As such, whistle-blower and anti-retaliation provisions are not adequately protecting workers who try to exercise their legal rights to speak out on workplace safety issues. A recent OSHA policy memo<sup>1</sup> told its inspectors to start investigating -- and in many cases, to cite employers for violations -- when the inspectors find many common employer practices that discourage employee reports of injuries.

On this Workers' Memorial Day, we need to join hands to seek stronger safety and health protections and better standards and enforcement. To quote Mother Jones, a small woman but a giant in the American labor movement, **"Mourn for the dead and fight like hell for the living."**

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<sup>1</sup> Employer Safety Incentive and Disincentive Policies and Practices, OSHA Policy Memorandum, March 12, 2012.