



April 28, 2017

**Workers' Memorial Day Statement
by
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In the United States, Canada, and many other countries, 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 Teamsters, were killed and injured on the job due to unsafe conditions. On behalf of all 1.4 million Teamsters, I ask that each of you take a few minutes on April 28th and remember these workers – and consider what we can do to improve both our working conditions and the legal protections we all deserve.

In December 1970, forty-six years ago, Congress passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), 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.

The toll of workplace injury, illness and death remains enormous. Some Teamsters within the union's 22 trade divisions and conferences, both in the private and public sectors, are particularly at risk, suffering very high rates of job injuries and fatalities. Roadway 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 disorders (MSDs) occur in about one out of three (31%) injury and illness cases requiring days away from work in 2015, without a corresponding standard to prevent them.

Hispanic and immigrant workers, who often work in the most dangerous jobs and are exploited by employers, often 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, employers often ignore these requirements and harass workers who try to exercise their legal rights to speak out on workplace safety issues. Fortunately, in 2016, after years of pressure by the Teamsters and others, OSHA finally upgraded workers' rights to report injuries free from retaliation – and prohibited employers from imposing policies that discourage workers from reporting injuries. While those rules are under attack by the Chamber of Commerce (and, we hope to see them fully enforced in the near future), OSHA has now told employers very clearly to stop harassing workers just because they have reported an injury – a basic worker right.

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."**