



**April 28, 2020**

**WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY STATEMENT  
PROTECTING WORKERS RIGHTS, SPEAKING OUT FOR SAFE JOBS**

**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 engage in fighting for safe workplaces for all.

The COVID-19 global pandemic caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) has affected everyone. As the viral disease wreaks havoc across the world, we carry the scars on our hearts from the devastating stories of injury and loss that can never be forgotten.

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 time on April 28<sup>th</sup> to remember these workers and the value they honorably upheld to provide you with a service.

This year is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act), by Congress, promising every worker the right to a safe job. Decades of hard-fought battles by workers and their Unions have resulted in significant improvements in working conditions to ensure protections afforded by that OSH Act. 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. We will continue to fight for workplace improvements and stand up for all workers to have a safe workplace that is free from recognized hazards. I will never apologize for standing up for workers' rights, for my fellow Teamsters, and all American workers.

The toll of workplace injury, illness, and death remain enormous. Some Teamsters within the Union's 24 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 (1,276 in 2018), 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 one out of three (31%) injury and illness cases requiring days away from work in 2018, without corresponding standards to prevent them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for government agencies to better protect essential service workers from hazards on the job, especially public service workers who may not be afforded OSHA protections without the presence of an approved OSHA State Plan. These essential service workers and sectors include, but are not limited to<sup>1</sup>:

- Sanitation and medical waste workers
- Law enforcement, firefighters, and first responders
- Healthcare workers and caregivers
- Mental health and Social Service Workers
- Restaurant and quick-serve food operations and food delivery employees
- Farmworkers

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ky3.com/content/news/LIST-Essential-and-non-essential-businesses-allowed-activities-under-Missouris-stay-at-home-order-569387651.html>

- Electricity and Utility Industry Employees
- Critical Manufacturing Employees (medical supply chains, energy, transportation, food, chemicals)
- Petroleum, Natural, and Propane Gas Workers
- Transportation and Logistics Warehouse Workers
- Workers supporting groceries, pharmacies, and other retail locations

Government agencies should support the development of a standard that would ensure worker safety during a public health infectious disease crisis like COVID-19. Creating a standard that would protect workers exposed to airborne infectious diseases has been an ongoing agenda item for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) since the 2010 H1N1 Flu Pandemic.

Unions have a crucial role in standing up for the rights of workers to have a safe and healthy workplace. In March, the IBT signed on to a petition together with other Unions asking OSHA to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard for Infectious Diseases to ensure that workers are protected from all infectious diseases, including COVID-19. Collectively Unions are demanding that federal agencies publish protective standards instead of guidance documents that are not legally enforceable. Further, hundreds of workers are fired or harassed by their employers each year for merely 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, whistleblower and anti-retaliation provisions are not adequately protecting workers who try to exercise their legal rights to speak out on workplace safety issues. The Teamsters have joined together with other Unions to expand emergency rules for workers' disability compensation so that protections provided for first responders extended to all workers deemed essential employees. Further, with U.S. Democrats in the House and Senate, we have supported passage of the Families First Coronavirus Act, and the CAREs Act.

The Teamsters Worker Training Program is using a combination of federal grant funding and funds from the Union's General fund to train members and other front-line workers on how to protect themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic. We continue to offer training through our safety and health department to members on a variety of workplace health and safety topics and make available resources, factsheets, and training in both English and Spanish. We are also supporting our Port Drivers and fighting against misclassification, which is an illegal practice that allows employers to avoid basic workplace protections like minimum wage, health insurance, disability, and more.

On this Workers' Memorial Day, let us work together in speaking up for stronger worker protections, stronger worker rights, and actively engage with political leaders and federal, state, and local agencies to gain stronger safety and health standards and enforcement actions that protect U.S. workers everywhere. We also urge you to get involved with your Local Union, create digital campaigns in your workplaces and communities, and initiate a call to action to protect workers' rights to safe jobs.

To quote Mother Jones, a giant in the American labor movement, **“Mourn for the dead and fight like hell for the living.”**