



NATIONAL COSH

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UNITED SUPPORT & MEMORIAL FOR
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As “OSHA Listens”, Families and safety experts present platform to end worker deaths

When OSHA opens its ears today for a first of its kind “OSHA Listens” session, the agency will hear voices from men and women whose children, siblings or parents were killed on the job. Together with workplace safety and health experts, they will present a new platform of recommendations aimed at putting an end to workplace injury, illness, and death. Advocates for improved workplace health and safety conditions released that platform of recommendations today calling on federal agencies to make fundamental changes to improve worker protections.

The report, *Policy Recommendations from the National Worker Safety and Health Summit*, addresses changes that need to be made by Congress in order to expand workers' rights to a safe and healthy workplace and increase the effectiveness of OSHA enforcement as well as changes that can be accomplished through OSHA regulations and administrative actions.

The report was released by the Protecting Workers Alliance, a national coalition made up of the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health; United in Support and Memorial of Workplace Fatalities (USMWF—a family and victims' rights advocacy group); individual members of the Occupational Health and Safety section of the American Public Health Association; and other concerned individuals. Members of the Alliance will present their policy recommendations to OSHA at the public forum today in Washington DC.

Family members of people killed on the job, including Katherine Rodriguez of USMWF, will be among those speaking at today's forum. “I have met many other families of workplace fatality victims and while the details of each incident are different, they all have one thing in common: these tragedies are all preventable,” said Ms. Rodriguez, who made the trip to Washington in honor of her father who was killed in a workplace accident in 2004. “I want to offer Assistant Secretary Michaels our support and tell him that we will be here to seek improvements to our country's safety efforts until there are no more families that need to come and speak at events such as this.”

Key recommendations include:

- Congress should pass the Protecting America's Workers Act (HR 2067 and S 1580) that would increase fines for serious violations of the OSH Act, expand OSHA coverage to all public employees (millions of whom lack OSHA protections currently), increase rights of victims and their family members, and increase protections for “whistleblowers.”

- OSHA should address the long overlooked epidemic of musculoskeletal injuries in the workplace, particularly among health care workers who suffer extremely high rates of such work injuries.
- OSHA should develop a new national system for ensuring that workers receive adequate health and safety training on the job and Congress should return funding for these programs at least to the levels provided in the 1970s under the Carter administration.
- OSHA should overhaul its system of regulating toxic chemicals on a chemical-by-chemical basis, which has failed to provide adequate protections for workers.
- OSHA should take aggressive action to protect immigrant workers, especially those with limited English ability, a group that experiences particularly high rates of fatality and serious injury.

Nearly 16 workers in the United States die each day from injuries sustained at work and 134 die from work-related diseases. An estimated 11,500 private-sector workers suffer a nonfatal work-related injury or illness each day in the U.S. Approximately 9,000 workers are treated in emergency departments each day because of occupational injuries and approximately 200 are hospitalized.

"Over the past eight years, federal job safety agencies have failed to fulfill their promise to protect workers' health and safety on the job. Workers continue to be killed and injured on the job at appallingly high rates, yet federal OSHA has failed to issue new protective standards or adequately enforce existing safety and health rules," said Tolle Graham, President of the National COSH and a health and safety specialist with the Massachusetts Coalition on Occupational Safety and Health. "Acts of gross negligence or criminal behavior leading to workplace deaths result in minor fines. And millions of public safety employees--the very workers that protect us all from natural or deliberate disasters--are outside the jurisdiction of federal OSHA entirely."

"No one knows and feels the consequences of these problems more than the victims and their loved ones. We need to act now to save others from the pain and suffering these preventable tragedies bring", said Tammy Miser of USMWF. Ms. Miser's brother was killed by a dust explosion at a Hays Lemmerz aluminum wheel plant in Indiana.

ABOUT THE PROTECTING WORKERS ALLIANCE:

The Protecting Workers Alliance (www.protectingworkers.org) was formed in 2009 by a coalition of organizations and individuals who believe that the nation's system of workplace safety and health protections urgently needs reform. The Alliance is led by the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health, a federation of 20 local and statewide "COSH" groups--Committees/Coalitions on Occupational Safety and Health (www.coshnetwork.org)--and United Support and Memorial for Workplace Fatalities (USMWF), the only US organization dedicated to families who have had a loss in the workplace (www.usmwf.org). In addition, members of the Occupational Health and Safety section of the American Public Health Association, the largest and most diverse public health organization in the world (www.apha.org) play an active role in the Alliance.

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