

Workers' Memorial Day

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A worker woke up this morning and prepared to go to his job - nothing special, nothing different from a hundred other days. The difference is today this worker won't be coming home. Today, this worker will die on the job. Co-workers, friends and loved ones will mourn. And, this will happen more than 15 times today and everyday in the United States and Canada.

April 28 is Workers' Memorial Day in the United States and Canada. Around the world people at International Workers' Memorial Day or International Commemoration Day (ICD) for Dead and Injured events mourn the two million women and men who die each year from job related accidents or diseases. That is one worker dying every 15 seconds. And, approximately 400 million workers are hurt or get sick annually around the world.

This is not just a problem in emerging countries. It doesn't only happen in other industries. And, it's not just about dying. IATSE members in the Entertainment Community go home everyday with injuries and illnesses. Workers are hurt from falls, tools, cars, lifting, equipment failure, poorly designed jobs, electricity, and hundreds of other things. Chemicals, biological hazards, infectious diseases, and environmental conditions cause illness. Stressors are an often overlooked problem. Work schedules, pressure to perform, hostile work environments, and time pressures are a few of the stressors researchers believe contribute to heart conditions, high blood pressure, being over weight, sleep disorders, and many other ailments afflicting workers.

But, April 28 is not just a day to remember; it is a day to take action. The feisty Mary Harris "Mother" Jones fought for mine workers. She said, "Pray for the dead, and fight like hell for the living."

There is not a good reason to put ourselves in harms way. We should fight to have a safe place to work as is required, by law, of our employers.

There are many ways to fight for safer work places. If you work for an employer who has safety plans in place, follow the plan. A good plan wants employee involvement. Employees should be part of safety committees, inci-

dent investigations, training development, and identifying and eliminating hazards. If the employer has no plan, help them create one. There are methods for doing this that will mean the best protection for workers.

We should support OSHA's efforts to protect workers. OSHA was started as a protector of workers. One of the things OSHA is looking into is increasing the penalties for violation of regulations. It is felt that the fines are not harsh enough to deter employers from fixing a problem. During a Workers' Memorial Day speech last year, David Michaels, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health, told about a worker being killed when a tank of acid exploded at a refinery. The OSHA penalty was \$175,000. The acid spilled into a near-by waterway killing thousands of fish and crabs. The EPA penalties were \$10 million, more than 50 times higher than the penalty for killing a worker.

Report hazards when you see them and accidents when they happen. Employers many times don't want accidents reported. They threaten people with their jobs or promise incentives if you go so many days without an accident. This results in under reporting of accidents and hazards, and it allows employers to hold up safety awards when little is done about major problems. Executives were out on the drilling rig in the gulf last April to accept a "seven year without a lost time accident" award when it exploded. Eleven workers died on that rig.

This April 28, show solidarity with workers around the world. Have a safety meeting at your workplace and take a moment of silence for those who died on the job. Wear a purple forget-me-knot ribbon (a purple ribbon with a knot tied in it). And, everyday do what you can to be safe on your job, and "remember the dead; fight for the living."

