

## AFL-CIO 'Death on the Job' Report: 5,214 Killed at Work in 2008

Posted By [Mike Hall](#) On April 27, 2010 @ 7:10 pm



Each workday, it's likely that 14 workers won't come home because they will be killed on the job, according to the most recent statistics. The AFL-CIO's 19th annual workplace safety report, "[1] [Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect](#)," also reports that in 2008, along with the 5,214 workers killed, another 50,000 workers died from occupational diseases, while at least 4.6 million workers were reported injured, unreported injuries could push that total to as many as 14 million workers.

Released on the eve of [2] [Workers Memorial Day](#) (more below) and on the heels of four recent workplace tragedies that have claimed the lives of at least 42 workers, the report depicts workplace safety and health laws that are far too weak to protect workers and penalties far too lenient to deter employers.

Pointing to the 29 coal miners killed at Massey Energy Co.'s [3] [Upper Big Branch](#) Mine in West Virginia, the seven workers killed at the [4] [Tesoro refinery](#) in Washington State, the six victims at the Kleen Energy Systems plant in Connecticut and the 11 oil platform workers who are presumed dead following an explosion of the [5] [Transocean Ltd. rig](#) in the Gulf of Mexico, Peg Seminario, AFL-CIO Safety and Health director, told the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee this afternoon:

The vast majority of workplace deaths and injuries could be prevented if protective safety and health measures were followed. But the fact is that for too many employers, the safety of workers is secondary, taking a back seat to production. For some employers, there is a total and blatant disregard for workers. Worker safety requirements and other worker protections are totally ignored.

We'll have more on the Senate testimony by Seminario and by Mine Workers ([6] [UMWA](#)) President Cecil Roberts tomorrow.

"Death on the Job" also reports that Latino workers are most in danger of dying at the workplace. In 2008, the fatality rate among these workers was 4.2 per 100,000 workers, 13.5 percent higher than the fatal injury rate for all U.S. workers.

When workers are killed on the job, the report notes that employers face "incredibly weak penalties." The median penalty in 2009 was just \$5,000 in fatality cases investigated by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA). In 2009, when an employer was cited for a serious safety violation, the average OSHA penalty was just \$965.

In addition, the report says OSHA's inspector workforce is "woefully inadequate," with just 2,218 inspectors to monitor the 8 million workplaces that fall under OSHA's jurisdictions. AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka says, "There is no question that eight years of neglect and inaction by the Bush administration"

seriously eroded safety and health protections, and put workers' lives in danger.

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In those eight year, according to "Death on the Job," safety and health standards were repealed, withdrawn and blocked. The job safety budget was cut and blocked. Voluntary employer compliance replaced strong enforcement. And the report adds:

In the absence of strong government oversight and enforcement, many employers cut back their workplace safety and health efforts.

Since the Obama administration took office, OSHA and MSHA are "returning to their mission to protect workers' safety and health." It notes that strong advocates have been appointed to head the agencies, workplace safety standards that had been stalled under the Bush administration are moving forward and the job safety budget has been increased and more inspectors hired.

But "job safety laws must be strengthened," including giving MSHA more authority to shut down dangerous mines and to enhance enforcement against repeated violators. The report urges passage of the [7] [Protecting America's Workers Act](#), which would:

- Extend the law's coverage to workers currently excluded;
- Strengthen civil and criminal penalties for violations;
- Enhance anti-discrimination protections; and
- Strengthen the rights of workers, unions and victims.

Click [1] [here](#) to download the full "Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect."

Tomorrow, among the hundreds of Workers Memorial Day events honoring those killed on the job and calling for strong new workplace safety standards, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler will speak at the dedication of the National Labor College's ([8] [NLC](#)'s) recently completed [9] [Workers Memorial](#). She will be joined by OSHA administrator David Michaels and the UMWA's Roberts.

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URLs in this post:

[1] Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect:

[http://www.aflcio.org/issues/safety/memorial/doj\\_2010.cfm](http://www.aflcio.org/issues/safety/memorial/doj_2010.cfm)

[2] Workers Memorial Day: <http://www.aflcio.org/issues/safety/memorial/>

[3] Upper Big Branch: <http://blog.aflcio.org/2010/04/12/methane-coal-dust-violations-cited-at-massey-mine-before-deadly-blast/>

[4] Tesoro refinery: <http://blog.aflcio.org/2010/04/26/seventh-worker-dies-from-refinery-blast/>

[5] Transocean Ltd. rig: <http://blog.aflcio.org/2010/04/22/oil-rig-blast-renews-usw-call-for-tougher-safety-regs/>

[6] UMWA: <http://www.umwa.org/>

[7] Protecting America's Workers Act: <http://blog.aflcio.org/2010/03/16/bigger-enforcement-hammer-saves-workers-e2%80%99-lives/>

[8] NLC: <http://www.nlc.edu/>

[9] Workers Memorial: <http://blog.aflcio.org/2010/01/21/honor-fallen-workers-with-memorial-brick-at-labor-college-site/>

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