Workers’ Memorial Day

“Lest We Forget”

VAN WILKES
Local 1137
Killed at Work
June 6, 1988

Workers Memorial Day, also called the Day of Mourning, is held every year on April 28. This date was chosen because it is both the anniversary of the implementation of the Occupational Safety and Health Act and a similar day of remembrance in Canada that began in 1984. In Canada the day is called the Workers’ Day of Mourning and was officially recognized by the Government in 1991. Every year on April 28, unions, communities and worksites in nearly one hundred countries recognize workers who have been killed or injured on the job.

MOURN FOR THE DEAD
FIGHT FOR THE LIVING

WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY • APRIL 28
WHEN SOMEBODY DIES AT WORK

THEY ARE NEVER THE ONLY VICTIM

Work deaths harm whole families • Workers’ Memorial Day • 28 April • www.hazards.org/wmd
Workers Memorial Day

Each year, more than two million women and men die as a result of work-related accidents and diseases. Workers suffer approximately 270 million occupational accidents each year, and fall victim to some 160 million incidents of work-related illnesses. Hazardous substances kill 440,000 workers annually while asbestos claims 100,000 lives. Worldwide, one worker dies every 15 seconds and in the U.S., 14 workers die every day due to preventable incidents.

Workers Memorial Day is so much more than a day to honor and remember our loved ones. Families from across our nation have learned that it is not enough to just mourn our loss. Over the years, our country has enacted laws to protect and ensure the safety of our citizens and their families in a variety of ways. We have enacted increasingly stringent seatbelt and child seat laws and fines for non-compliance. We protect our air travelers, skies, and country with increased airport security measures. We protect our citizens against criminal acts through increased criminal penalties, especially against the habitual and/or most egregious offenders. We protect the victims of crimes through victim rights legislation, registries, release notifications and even protection programs. We protect our citizens against financial fraud through both the criminal and regulatory systems. We protect our citizens where and how they live through effective zoning, safe water, clean air, and manufacturing standards for housing, appliances, furniture, clothing, and seek retribution against those who jeopardize the safety and well-being of others. We protect our citizens at play also, from infant toy standards, special licenses and education, rules, regulations, manufacturing standards and increased safety equipment. We even protect the rights of those who do us harm. Should we not protect our workers at their jobs and their families in comparable ways? Is not investing in our workers, investing in the greatest asset of our country? During this Workers Memorial Day we need to not only remember the fallen, but we must call attention to preventable incidents and combine the efforts of all to gain reasonable and effective health and safety solutions for workers, employers and families.

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According to the United States Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics there were 74 fatal occupational injuries in the state of Alabama in 2011 (the last year statistics are available).

“Often times we hear about someone getting killed on the job, and it’s on the news, briefly mentioned then quickly forgotten as the news person moves on to something more sensational. I know that you and I, and our Union, are different – we take the time to put a face to that person – a father, a mother, brother, sister, grandfather, or grandmother, a special friend, one of our members.”

Carol Landry, USW Vice President
SAFE JOBS
SAVE LIVES
Make Your Voice Heard

FOUR DECADES AGO, Congress passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act, promising every worker the right to a safe job. Unions and our allies have fought hard to make that promise a reality—winning protections that have made jobs safer, saved hundreds of thousands of lives and prevented millions of workplace injuries and illnesses.

But our work is not done. Many job hazards are unregulated and uncontrolled. Some employers cut corners and violate the law, putting workers in serious danger and costing lives. Workers who report job hazards or job injuries are fired or disciplined. Employers contract out dangerous work to try to avoid responsibility. As a result, each year thousands of workers are killed and millions more injured or diseased because of their jobs.

The Obama administration has moved forward to strengthen protections with tougher enforcement and a focus on workers’ rights. But much-needed safeguards on silica and other workplace hazards have stalled in the face of fierce attacks by business groups and the Republican majority in the U.S. House of Representatives who want to stop new protections.

We must press forward.

On April 28, the unions of the AFL-CIO observe Workers Memorial Day to remember those who have suffered and died on the job and to renew the fight for safe workplaces. This year we will come together to call for good jobs in this country that are safe and healthy. We will seek stronger safeguards to prevent injuries and save lives. We will stand for the right of all workers to raise job safety concerns without fear of retaliation, and for the freedom to form unions and speak out and bargain for respect and a better future. Please join us and make your voice heard.

AFL-CIO • OBSERVE WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY • APRIL 28
Decades of struggle by workers and their unions have resulted in significant improvements in working conditions. But progress is threatened as employers seek to cut corners and shirk responsibility and business opponents try to block needed safeguards and stronger workers’ rights. It is time to organize, take action and speak out for safe jobs for workers, including:

- Defending safety and health protections and workers’ rights from industry attacks.
- Requiring employers to find and fix hazards and implement a worksite safety and health program, with full worker participation, to prevent injuries, illnesses and deaths.
- Winning new workplace safeguards for silica, combustible dust and infectious diseases.
- Strengthening protections for miners, including tighter standards for coal dust to protect against Black Lung.
- Prohibiting employer policies and practices that discourage reporting of workplace injuries.
- Passing the Protecting America’s Workers Act to provide OSHA protection for all workers who lack protection, stronger criminal and civil penalties for companies that seriously violate job safety laws and improved anti-retaliation protections for workers who raise job safety concerns.
- Ensuring workers’ right to have a voice on the job, and to freely choose to join a union without employer interference or intimidation.
I doubt if any of us who were here in June, 1988 will ever forget where we were when we got news of Van Wilkes’ death. I hope we never experience that again. Besides Van, there have others - from the other locals, contractors, truck drivers – who have been killed here at the Courtland Mill. We can’t forget them either.

Workers Memorial Day is also a time to remember those whose lives have been forever changed by non-fatal workplace injuries (Buddy Terry, Ken Williams and many more), those who are still able to work here at the mill but have permanent physical restrictions due to injuries that occurred here and those countless ones whose deaths and illnesses, although not officially cited as being work-related, were caused by their working conditions just as surely as Van’s was.

On Sunday, April 28, we should all pause for a moment to remember these and others throughout the world. Tell your families that it is Workers Memorial Day and tell them what it means.

When your church asks if there are any prayer requests, announce that it is Workers Memorial Day and ask for prayers for the families, friends and co-workers of those who have died or been disabled as result of workplace injuries and illnesses.

In Solidarity and Remembrance - Johnny