



NATIONAL COSH
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The National COSH Platform for Occupational Safety and Health in the Obama Administration

For the past eight years, federal agencies responsible for worker safety and health have acted passively, resisting changes and modernization critically necessary for providing true protections for America's workforce. While some progress has been made in falling fatality rates, the toll on workers' health and safety remains far too high. It is time for the Department of Labor to reorient its priorities and take worker safety protections to a new level.

Increase Worker Participation and Expand Workers' Rights: All workers should be covered by comprehensive, worksite-specific injury and illness prevention programs, including mandatory safety and health training of a minimum of 10 hours. All workers should be aggressively protected by the Department of Labor from harassment, firing and other forms of discrimination for reporting unsafe conditions, refusing unsafe work, filing complaints with OSHA or MSHA, and all other protected worksite activities. The OSHA training grants should be expanded for programs that build workers' capacity to understand and exercise their safety and health rights, and to play an effective role in injury and illness prevention. All federally funded jobs programs should include mandatory safety and health training.

Extend OSHA Coverage to all Employees, Address Unregulated Hazards, and Increase Enforcement: The Secretary of Labor should actively endorse legislation that will provide fundamental legal and safety protections to agricultural workers, extend OSHA coverage to public employees, and authorize the Department to issue health-protective standard(s) to address ergonomic hazards. The Secretary of Labor should actively seek greater OSHA funding for its enforcement functions, including fatality, complaint and discrimination investigations, and for the completion of standards on unregulated workplace hazards.

Strengthen OSHA's Penalty Structure: OSHA's maximum penalties must be increased to deter employers from engaging in unsafe conduct that threatens the lives of workers. Penalties for willful violations, in particular, should be increased and the OSHA Director should discourage the downgrading of citations in the course of negotiations with employers. OSHA should seek to use its limited criminal referral authority in cases of extreme negligence and the Secretary of Labor should endorse legislation making egregious violations of the OSH Act a felony and increasing OSHA's criminal referral authority.

Count All Injuries and Illnesses. OSHA and MSHA should conduct robust enforcement audits to ensure accurate recording by employers of work-related injuries and illnesses including strong penalties for employer programs that discourage reporting. Employer records should be supplemented with data from workers, state-based public health programs and health systems to construct a comprehensive national surveillance system.

Eliminate Disparities. All workers — regardless of their ethnicity, race, nationality or the industrial sector — have the right to safe and healthy working conditions. The Secretary of Labor should be committed to eliminating the unacceptably high rates of deaths, injuries and illnesses among vulnerable populations, including African-American, Hispanic, immigrant workers, and young workers. Emergency response workers should be fully covered by OSHA protections. OSHA should ensure that non-English speaking immigrant workers receive training that they truly understand.

Reform Workers' Compensation Programs. The Secretaries of Labor and HHS should convene a national commission to recommend improvements to our state-based systems to care for and compensate injured and ill workers. Safety and Health Agencies need to include victim's families in investigation and follow-up proceedings.

Reduce or Eliminate Widespread Use of Toxic Chemicals. The Secretary of Labor should work with other members of the President's Cabinet and Congress to institute a comprehensive chemicals policy. This policy should be grounded in the fundamental principles of precaution, substitution of toxic chemicals with safer alternatives, and worker and community right-to-know.

The National COSH is a federation of 21 local and statewide "COSH" groups--Committees/Coalitions on Occupational Safety and Health. COSH groups are private, non-profit coalitions of labor unions, health and technical professionals, and others interested in promoting and advocating for worker health and safety. The first COSH group was founded in 1972.

