OBAMA-BIDEN TRANSITION PROJECT

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UFCW a VOICE for working America

# Worker Safety and Health

The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union represents 1.3 million workers in North America, primarily in the grocery, retail, and meatpacking industries.

The food manufacturing sector is one of the most dangerous—on average, 12 workers per 100 are injured each year, an injury rate twice that of other manufacturing sectors. While reported injuries for poultry are markedly fewer, it is well accepted that these statistics are low and reflect a serious issue of underreporting. The food manufacturing industry primarily employs immigrant and Latino workers, who are overrepresented in injury and fatality statistics.

UFCW's broad position on needed reforms to health and safety regulations is shared with Change to Win (CTW) and the AFL-CIO. Health and safety issues affecting food workers specifically are discussed below.

Three issues of specific concern to the UFCW are outlined in both the AFL and the CTW position papers on worker safety and health. Recordkeeping for work-related injuries and illnesses is deeply flawed. A new system, perhaps workers reporting injuries through a different mechanism than their employers, needs to be considered. Enforcement must target low-reporting industries such as poultry where recordkeeping rules are violated. Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSD) are the number one injury among workers in the retail food and food manufacturing industries. The Bush administration has ignored this continuing epidemic. Data will need to improve through reinstatement of the MSD column on the OSHA 300 logs. Inspections in the high hazard industries of retail food and food manufacturing must be conducted. Regulation will be needed. The UFCW petitioned the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) for two Emergency Temporary Standards, diacetyl and combustible dust. Both were denied. These standards, which are in the pipeline, must be completed.

There is evidence of a correlation between line speeds and crewing in the poultry and meatpacking industries and worker injuries. OSHA should set and regulate line speed. The approach would be to assess the number of repetitions performed and the cycle times of each element of the jobs, coupled with rest and recovery periods. There is research on "safe" numbers of repetitions and cycle times. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) should conduct further research into line speeds and workplace injuries in these industries. There will have to be mandated conditions under which companies will be required to comply with requests from NIOSH for access. Up to this point, the industries have refused.