

*Protect, Prevent, Live Well*

December 15, 2008

## **The Protecting Workers on the Job Agenda: Priorities for Federal Action**

The public health principle of **PREVENTION** should be the guiding force behind all DOL regulatory and enforcement programs addressing occupational health and safety.

**Put Health & Safety First For All Workers.** Appointees to every senior position at MSHA, OSHA and SOL should pledge to protect the right of all workers to healthy and safe workplaces, regardless of ethnicity, race, nationality or industrial sector. 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, improve the deterrent effect of OSHA penalties, 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 fatality, complaint and discrimination investigations, and for the completion of standards on unregulated workplace hazards and worksite-specific injury and illness prevention program.

**Count All Injuries and Illnesses.** Surveillance is key for an effective public health program. OSHA and MSHA should conduct robust enforcement audits to ensure accurate recording by employers of work-related injuries and illnesses. Employer records should be supplemented with data from workers, State-based public health programs and health systems to construct a comprehensive national surveillance system on all adverse health conditions related to working conditions.

**Increase Worker Participation.** All workers should be aggressively protected by the Department of Labor from harassment, firing and other forms of discrimination for reporting unsafe conditions, filing complaints with OSHA or MSHA, and all other protected worksite activities. The Secretary of Labor should support the “Private Sector Whistleblower Protection Streamlining Act” and the “Employee Free Choice Act.” The OSHA training grants should be designated for programs that build workers’ capacity to understand and exercise their safety and health rights, and to serve a meaningful and effective role in injury and illness prevention.

**Eliminate Disparities.** All workers — regardless of their ethnicity, race, nationality or the industrial sector in which they work — 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 and immigrant workers.

**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.

**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 in order to ensure the health protection of workers, their families and communities.

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