



PREVENTABLE

DEATHS



COSH

2016

Our Mission



COSHNetwork.org

The National Council for Occupational Safety and Health is dedicated to promoting safe and healthy working conditions for all working people, through education, training, organizing and advocacy. Our belief that almost all work-related injuries and illnesses are preventable motivates us to encourage workers to take action to protect their safety and health, promote protection from retaliation under job safety laws, and provide quality information and training about hazards on the job and workers' rights.

Workers' Memorial Week, April 23 to April 30, 2016

This report is released to mark Workers' Memorial Week, a remembrance of those who have lost their lives at work. The event is observed nationwide—and around the world—by surviving family members as well as health and safety activists in workplaces and communities. It coincides with the anniversary of the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Act, which took effect on April 28, 1971.

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Executive Summary

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH (COSH) is one of the leading organizations advocating for the right of workers to go home safe to their families every day. This work is critical, as each year thousands of workers are killed and millions more suffer work-related injuries and illnesses.

Preventable Deaths 2016 outlines key trends from the most recent available data, including:

- ▶ **More workers died** in calendar year 2014 than in 2013.
- ▶ **There were 4,821 deaths** on the job from traumatic events in 2014, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. This is the most recent year for which data are available.
- ▶ **Fatalities increased in 2014** in the agriculture, construction, mining and manufacturing sectors. There were also more on-the-job deaths among older workers and temporary and contract workers.
- ▶ **Significant causes of death—such as slips, trips and falls are preventable**, by following documented and entirely effective safety protocols. OSHA's fall protection rule, for example, is first on the list of safety standards most frequently violated by U.S. employers.
- ▶ **More than 95,000 U.S. workers died from long-term occupational diseases** in 2008, according to a recent estimate by leading scholars and practitioners. The figure is higher than previous estimates.

▶ **Cancer claims more lives than any other occupational disease** in most countries. The disease can be prevented, writes safety engineer Jukka Takala, president of the International Commission on Occupational Health, "by reducing or eliminating the exposures leading to the disease."

This year, for the first time, National COSH also recognizes Outstanding Health and Safety Stories, in print, online, broadcast and on film. The selected stories, based on an extensive review of media about occupational safety published and produced during the past year, feature in-depth investigations of critical health and safety issues.

The selected film is "[A Day's Work](#)," released in 2015 and produced by David M. Garcia and Dave DeSario.

The selected print, online and broadcast stories are:

- ▶ *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, "[Gasping for Action](#)," by Raquel Rutledge, Feb. 14, 2015, June 20, 2015, Oct. 20, 2015, Dec. 30, 2015
- ▶ *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, "[Tragic Harvest](#)," by Jeffrey Meitrodt, Oct. 4, 5, 6, 7, 2015
- ▶ *National Public Radio and ProPublica.org*, "[Inside Corporate America's Campaign to Ditch Workers' Comp](#)," by Howard Berkes and Michael Grabell, Oct. 14, 2015
- ▶ *Center for Public Integrity and Slate.com*, "[Common solvent keeps killing workers, consumers](#)," by Jamie Smith Hopkins, October 21, 2015

▶ [New York Times, "Safety Lapses and Deaths Amid a Building Boom in New York,"](#) by David W. Chen, Nov. 26, 2015

▶ [McClatchy Newspapers, "Irradiated: The hidden legacy of 70 years of atomic weaponry: At least 33,480 Americans dead,"](#) By Rob Hotakainen, Lindsay Wise, Frank Matt and Samantha Ehlinger, Dec. 11, 2015

(Note: Print, online and broadcast stories are presented in order of date of publication. National COSH recognizes each of these stories equally as an extraordinary contribution to public understanding of workplace safety.)

The analysis of trends in workplace deaths and the summaries of Outstanding Health and Safety Stories are both illustrated with specific examples

of workers who have become seriously ill or who have died as a result of workplace traumas or long-term diseases.

Workers featured in the trends analysis are drawn from the [U.S. Worker Fatality Database](#), a listing of fallen workers maintained by National COSH and the Workers Defense Project at COSHNetwork.org.

Workers featured in the Outstanding Health and Safety Stories section are based on reporting by the journalists and filmmakers who authored and produced the winning stories.

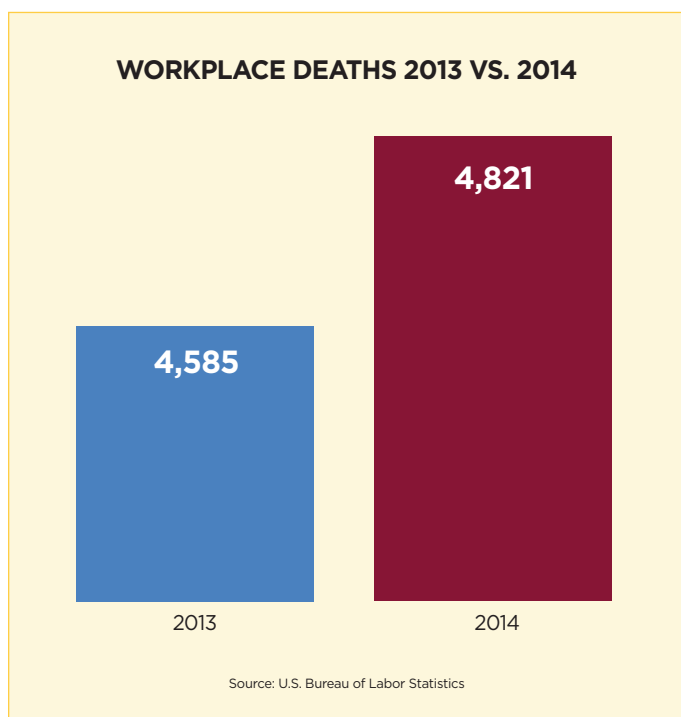
The report concludes with a summary of advocacy, research and training efforts by local COSH groups, aimed at empowering workers and improving health and safety conditions in U.S. workplaces.

Death on the Job: More Workers Are Dying

MORE U.S. WORKERS ARE DYING ON THE JOB.

That's the finding from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), which compiles the annual Census of Fatal Occupational Industries (CFOI). According to data from BLS released in April of 2016, **there were 4,821 deaths on the job from traumatic workplace events** in 2014.¹ This is the most recent year for which data are available.

The rate of workers dying on the job has also increased, from 3.3 deaths per 100,000 full-time equivalent workers in 2013 to 3.4 deaths in 2014.



U.S. WORKER FATALITY DATABASE

The U.S. Worker Fatality Database is the most comprehensive, open source listing ever created about U.S. women and men who have lost their lives on the job. The Database combines government reports, news accounts and information provided by families. It features specific data—including the name of the deceased, employer, circumstances of death and links to news reports—of more than 1,300 on-the-job deaths from traumatic injuries in 2015.

Although the Database is more current than aggregate data released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), this volunteer data-gathering effort is likely to cover less than one-third of all traumatic workplace fatalities for 2015. The total death count, as measured by BLS, has averaged more than 4,500 deaths per year over the past several years.

The Database is a collaborative effort including National COSH, United Support & Memorial for Workplace Fatalities (USMWF), Center for Construction Research and Training, Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSH), North East New York COSH (NENYCOSH) and Global Worker Watch, Workers Defense Project and the Beyond OSHA Project.

www.coshnetwork.org/fatality-database

DEATH ON THE JOB



MORE WORKERS ARE DYING ON THE JOB

Deaths from Traumatic Events

4,821
IN 2014



4,585
IN 2013



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

By Sector: Between 2013 and 2014, the number of deaths *increased* in agriculture, construction, mining and manufacturing.

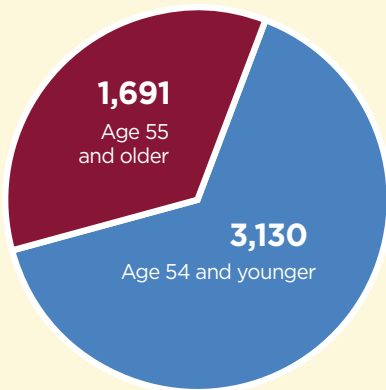
By age: More than 1/3 of all workers who died on the job due to traumatic incidents in 2014 were 55 years of age or older. The preliminary death toll of 1,691 for this age group is the highest ever recorded since the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries began in 1992.

By workplace status: 802 contracted workers died on the job in 2014, representing 16.7 percent of

all fatalities. This is seven percent higher than the 749 contracted workers who were killed at work in 2013. Based on reports from workers and safety experts,² as well as the results of accident and fatality investigations, we know that contract and temporary workers are frequently assigned to the most hazardous jobs on many worksites.

By demographics: For the first year in some time, deaths among Hispanic or Latino workers *decreased* by three percent compared to the previous year. Deaths among white, African-American and Asian workers, however, were all higher in 2014 than in 2013.

WORKPLACE DEATHS BY AGE, 2014



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

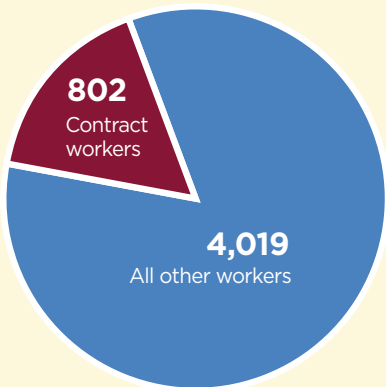
DEATH AT AGE 63

JOHN MARCOS CASTANEDA, 63, suffocated and died at a construction site in Fitch, Texas on June 30, 2015, when a trench collapsed on him. OSHA investigated Castaneda's employer, Lubbock Plains Pump Company, and cited the firm for three serious violations, with a total proposed fine of \$12,600. Violations included failure to follow specific excavation requirements and failure to observe requirements for protective systems.

Source: National COSH, U.S. Worker Fatality Database



DEATHS BY WORKPLACE STATUS, 2014



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

DEATH OF A TEMP WORKER

JEFFREY HENSLEY, 26, was a temporary worker at the Koch Tennessee furniture factory in Whitesburg, Tennessee. He was operating a machine saw, out of view of his co-workers, when he was electrocuted and collapsed on Oct. 7, 2015. A co-worker who tried to assist him also received an electrical shock. Hensley, who was on assignment from Professional Personnel Services in Rogersville, Tennessee, was pronounced dead on arrival at Morristown-Hamblen Healthcare System. A young daughter survives him.

Source: National COSH, U.S. Worker Fatality Database



1,691
DEATHS

OLDER WORKERS

MORE THAN 1/3

of workers who died on the job due to traumatic incidents in 2014 were age 55 or older.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

WHO IS AT RISK?

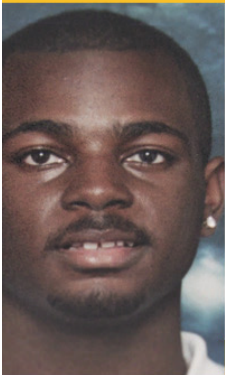
TEMPORARY AND CONTRACT WORKERS

16.7% of all fatalities



In 2014, 802 contract workers died on the job from traumatic events.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



DAQUAN "DAY" DAVIS

Died at age 21, 90 minutes after reporting to his first-ever shift at his first-ever job.

His story is told in the award-winning film, "A Day's Work."

Source: "A Day's Work." www.TempFilm.com



WERE THESE DEATHS PREVENTABLE?

Yes. For example, there has been a 13 percent *increase* in reported deaths from falls, slips and trips, with 818 deaths compared to 724 deaths in 2013. This includes an 11 percent increase in deaths from falls to a lower level.

The hazards associated with working at heights and near unprotected sides, wall openings and floor holes are well documented, as are safety protocols to protect workers in these situations. In fact, “fall protection” was first on OSHA’s list of the ten most frequently violated safety standards in U.S. workplaces in fiscal year 2015.³ Employers were cited 7,402 times, OSHA reports, for failing to observe fall protection standards.

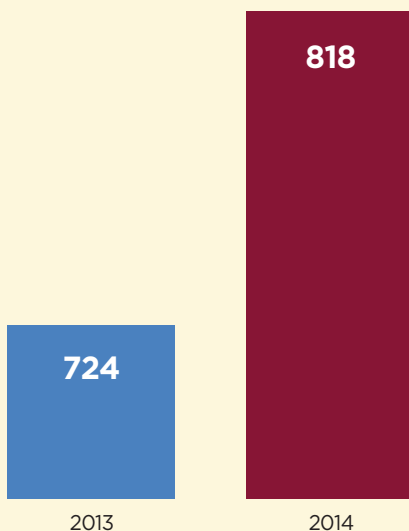
Federal rules on fall protection have been in force for 45 years and actually pre-date OSHA. The first standards, for workers on federally funded construction projects, were issued in April 1971 under terms of the Construction Safety Act and were adopted later that year as OSHA standards applying to the entire construction industry.⁴

The current fall protection standard requires that whenever a worker is exposed to a fall risk of four feet or higher in general industry, or six feet or higher in construction, the employer must implement fall protection. This may include guardrails, safety nets, or fall arrest systems. Any openings or holes at the worksite must be covered immediately, and equipment and training must be available for proper use of ladders and scaffolds.

In general, OSHA requirements and professional standards prioritize fall *prevention* systems, such as guard rails, rather than fall *protection* systems, such as safety nets or harnesses due to the increased effectiveness of these controls.


With more than 800 deaths and counting in 2014, it’s clear that employers are not doing enough to fully implement the crucial—and frequently violated—fall protection standard that can prevent workers from losing their lives.

WORKPLACE DEATHS FROM FALLS, SLIPS AND TRIPS



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

DEATH FROM A FALL



JAMES DALE LEECE, 54, fell 55 feet to his death while working on a construction site in Charlotte, North Carolina on October 18, 2015. Leece, who worked for Leau Enterprises, was working from a 12’ ladder on the fifth floor balcony of a commercial building, reaching to apply masking tape to the upper corner of the ceiling. He fell over a railing and died from injuries sustained when he hit the concrete pavement.

Leece was not safeguarded from falling, although OSHA standards require that employers provide fall protection, along with proper training, for those working at a height of six feet or higher on construction sites.

Source: National COSH, U.S. Worker Fatality Database

ARE WORKPLACE DEATHS PREVENTABLE?



818
IN 2014

WORKPLACE DEATHS FROM FALLS, SLIPS AND TRIPS

724
IN 2013



Proper fall protection: Roofing job surrounded by horizontal under-eave guardrail system, a “safety by design” structure that protects against falls from any location on the worksite.

- Hazards of working at heights are well-documented—and so are safety protocols to protect workers.
- “Fall protection” was first on OSHA’s list of ten-most violated safety standards in 2015.
- Employers cited 7,402 times for failing to observe fall protection standards.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; *Safety+Health*, Nov. 22, 2015



DEATHS FROM LONG-TERM OCCUPATIONAL ILLNESS

In addition to the 4,821 deaths in 2014 reported by the BLS, tens of thousands of workers die each year from long-term exposure to workplace hazards. These deaths—from cancer as well as heart, lung, kidney and other diseases that are linked to workplace exposure—can also be prevented.

A recent estimate by leading scholars and practitioners indicates that in 2008, more than 95,000 U.S. workers died from long-term occupational diseases.⁵ This figure is higher than previous estimates, and is more than 18 times the 5,214 U.S. deaths from sudden traumatic events that same year, as reported by BLS.⁶

Around the globe, researchers estimate more than 2 million deaths a year from long-term work-related illnesses. The findings are from a research team led by Jukka Takala, a safety engineer who is president of the International Commission on Occupational Health and former director of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work.

Takala, who is presently executive director of the Workplace Safety and Health Institute in Singapore, presented [his team's findings](#) to the American Industrial Hygiene Association in 2013, where he received the organization's Yant Award honoring his contributions to the field. The [groundbreaking data](#)

[was also published in The Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene](#) in May 2014.

No different than sudden deaths due to workplace trauma, these millions of work-related fatalities can also be prevented, by reducing toxic hazards, improving work processes and involving workers in safety programs that systematically assess, evaluate and reduce health risks.

Following publication of his team's research, Takala followed up with "Eliminating Workplace Cancer," [an editorial published in May 2015 in Industrial Health](#), a publication of Japan's National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health.⁷

"[C]ancer at work is the biggest individual threat when looking at deaths in the developed world," wrote Takala:

[T]his serious and preventable disease is rapidly becoming the biggest killer at places of work in most countries in the world... [I]t is clear that cancers caused by work can be prevented by reducing or eliminating the exposures leading to the disease... We need to influence and advocate for measurable and continuous reduction of exposures caused by work globally and across regions in order to eliminate occupational cancer."

DEATH ON THE JOB

ACUTE TRAUMA VS. LONG-TERM EXPOSURE IN 2008

5,214

Deaths from acute
traumatic events

95,808

Deaths from
long-term exposure



Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene May 2014

Outstanding Health and Safety Stories



American workers are dying—but American journalism is not dead.

This year, National COSH recognizes **Outstanding Workplace Health and Safety Stories** published and produced during the past year.

The winning stories were selected by the National COSH team of staff, consultants and volunteer members of our Board of Directors, based on an extensive review of media about occupational safety published during the past year.

Film

- ▶ “[A Day’s Work](#)”, released in 2015 and produced by David M. Garcia and Dave DeSario

Print, Internet and Broadcast

- ▶ *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, “[Gasping for Action](#),” by Raquel Rutledge, Feb. 14, 2015, June 20, 2015, Oct. 20, 2015, Dec. 30, 2015
- ▶ *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, “[Tragic Harvest](#),” by Jeffrey Meitrodt, Oct. 4, 5, 6, 7, 2015
- ▶ *National Public Radio and ProPublica.org*, “[Inside Corporate America’s Campaign to Ditch Workers’ Comp](#),” by Howard Berkes and Michael Grabell, Oct. 14, 2015
- ▶ *Center for Public Integrity and Slate.com*, “[Common solvent keeps killing workers, consumers](#),” by Jamie Smith Hopkins, October 21, 2015

- ▶ *New York Times*, “[Safety Lapses and Deaths Amid a Building Boom in New York](#),” by David W. Chen, Nov. 26, 2015
- ▶ *McClatchy Newspapers*, “[Irradiated: The hidden legacy of 70 years of atomic weaponry: At least 33,480 Americans dead](#),” By Rob Hotakainen, Lindsay Wise, Frank Matt and Samantha Ehlinger, Dec. 11, 2015

(Note: Print, online and broadcast stories are presented in order of date of publication. National COSH recognizes each of these stories equally as an extraordinary contribution to public understanding of workplace safety.)

America needs more journalism that focuses on the hidden costs paid by workers for simply doing their jobs—especially at a time when too much of what passes for “news” is little more than an effort to chase clicks with provocative headlines.

Indeed, if these stories provoke anything, it is outrage at the illnesses, injuries and deaths that could be prevented if workers were empowered at their job sites, if employers followed established safety protocols, and if government agencies aggressively enforced stricter regulations.

The selected articles and film add to our understanding of how workers are exposed to dangerous—sometimes fatal—risks in their workplaces. Armed with this information, workers, activists and public health professionals can work to reduce future illnesses, injuries and fatalities.

Film: **A DAY'S WORK**

Produced by David M. Garcia and Dave DeSario, 2015



Film: **A DAY'S WORK**

Produced by David M. Garcia and Dave DeSario, 2015

This one-hour documentary film centers on the story of Daquan “Day” Davis, a young man from Jacksonville, Florida who died in 2012 at the age of 21 on the very first day of his very first job.

Davis was crushed to death while working under a palletizer at a Bacardi bottling plant in Jacksonville. But Bacardi wasn’t his actual employer; Davis was assigned to the job by Remedy Intelligent Staffing, a temp agency. He began his first shift after a 15-minute training session, and was asked to clean out broken bottles from a stalled palletizer. The machines started up again while Davis was still underneath it, burying him under a platform holding up to 60 cases of rum.

Blending personal stories and factual reporting, “A Day’s Work” tells the story of a growing temp industry that puts workers at risk and allows employers to avoid responsibility for injuries, illnesses—and even death. It is an unusual combination: a compelling movie with a strong and effective message. As reviewer Nina Metz writes in [The Chicago Tribune](#):

Social justice documentaries are often very good at generating a sense of outrage; too many, though, are crafted without much attention to the fact that they are first and foremost movies that need clarity and momentum and textured characters to latch onto. Good documentaries entertain as well as inform, and “A Day’s Work” is canny about how it accomplishes this. The film is neither hectoring nor medicinal, not overly earnest or manipulative—a rarity in this genre—as it makes the case that temp workers are increasingly treated like disposable machine parts.

“A Day’s Work” has been a selected feature at six film festivals and won the Opening Night and Audience awards at the Workers Unite Film Festival in New York City in 2015. The film has been screened for labor unions, safety groups, universities and other organizations throughout the United States, with more than 30 screenings scheduled in March, April and May of 2016.



DEATH AT BACARDI

DAY DAVIS took the selfie at left and sent it to his fiancée before starting his first shift at Bacardi. He promised to call her during his first break—but he didn’t live that long. He was crushed to death 90 minutes later.

Following an OSHA investigation of the circumstances of Davis’ death, Bacardi was assessed a fine of \$195,000, eventually reduced to \$110,000. The company operated its bottling plant, OSHA found, with “plain indifference” and “intentional disregard” for safety protocols.

Remedy Intelligent Staffing, Davis’ actual employer of record, paid no fine at all.

Print, Internet and Broadcast Stories:

GASPING FOR ACTION

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel by Raquel Rutledge Feb. 14, 2015, June 20, 2015, Oct. 20, 2015, Dec. 30, 2015

This four-part series examines dangers to workers and consumers of flavoring chemicals—in particular, diacetyl, widely used in the manufacture of coffee, microwave popcorn, cheese, candy and other food products. The chemical is also an ingredient of flavored e-cigarettes, which are gaining wide popularity among consumers as a “safe” alternative to regular cigarettes.

As Rutledge reports, exposure to diacetyl can be extremely hazardous. The chemical, she writes:

has been linked to hundreds of injuries—and at least five deaths—to men and women who worked at popcorn factories and flavoring companies in Wisconsin, Missouri, Illinois and other states in the last 15 years...

Diacetyl attacks, inflames and virtually obliterates the bronchioles, the lung's tiniest airways. As the body tries to heal, scar tissue builds up and further restricts the airways. The disease is called bronchiolitis obliterans; the damage, irreversible.



Photo: Gary Porter, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

DANGERS OF DIACEYTL

EMANUEL DIAZ DE LEON, a former worker at the Distant Lands Coffee roasting plant in Tyler, Texas, has been diagnosed with bronchiolitis obliterans. He has so much difficulty breathing that he can no longer work and is now on disability. Diaz de Leon does not smoke, but doctors say that, at age 41, he has the lungs of a 70 year old.

Despite years of study, and a request in 2006 by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and the United Food and Commercial Workers for an emergency regulation, there is still no federal regulation in place limiting exposure to diacetyl. Workers in bakeries, candy factories, coffee roasting facilities, dairies, popcorn factories and other food processing operations are at risk of disease from this harmful chemical.

Other key findings from the *Journal Sentinel*:

- ▶ Industry lobbyists from small businesses in the dairy, baking, brewing and wine-making industries lobbied the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration, urging the agency **not** to issue safety regulations covering diacetyl.
- ▶ “More than 85,000 pounds of diacetyl were added to food in 2010, the most recent year for which figures are available from the Flavor and Extract Manufacturers Association.”
- ▶ “U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics lists 658 establishments nationwide that manufacture coffee or tea as their primary business. Those companies employ nearly 20,000 people.”
- ▶ Many physicians do not recognize and diagnose *bronchiolitis obliterans* and its link to workplace exposure. “It’s not the first thing doctors think of when a patient has a bad cough or shortness of breath,” Rutledge reports. “More common diagnoses are asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.”

Raquel Rutledge is an investigative reporter at the *Journal Sentinel*. She investigated the hazards of diacetyl during a nine-month O’Brien Fellowship in Public Service Journalism through the Diederich College of Communication at Marquette University. Rutledge was assisted by Marquette student researchers **Alyssa Voboril**, **Robyn St. John**, **Shiyao Li**, **Kelly Meyerhofer** and **Sarah Hauer**.

DEADLY FLAVORS?



- **DIACETYL** is a common chemical used by popcorn factories and flavoring companies, linked to diseases that cause irreversible lung damage.
- More than **85,000 pounds** of diacetyl were added to U.S. foods in 2010.
- Tens of thousands of **workers exposed** in coffee roasting plants.
- **Thousands more** in facilities making candy, cheese, popcorn, baked goods and other foods.
- Diacetyl is also **widely used** in flavorings for e-cigarettes.

Source: *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, "Gasping for Action," 2015

Print, Internet and Broadcast Stories:

TRAGIC HARVEST

Minneapolis Star Tribune by **Jeffrey Meitrodt** Oct. 4, 5, 6, 7, 2015

“Tragic Harvest,” a four-part investigative series, documents an alarming increase in fatalities in Minnesota agriculture during the past decade. “More than 210 work-related deaths occurred on Minnesota farms from 2003 to 2013,” writes Meitrodt, “an increase of more than 30 percent when compared with a decade earlier.”

Common causes of death on the farm include:

- ▶ tractor rollovers
- ▶ suffocation inside grain bins
- ▶ fatalities caused when farmers—often working alone—attempt to repair malfunctioning equipment.

Most loss of life, according to the *Star Tribune*, takes place on small family farms, which are exempt from federal safety regulations (unless employing more than 10 workers). As stated in an overview to the series:

The family farms that dot the Midwestern landscape are some of the most dangerous places in America to work. Training is scarce, rules lax—and deaths are rising.

Additional key findings:

- ▶ Farming is one of the most dangerous jobs in the United States, with more than 5,000 fatalities since 2003.
- ▶ Crop production, with 22.9 deaths per 100,000 workers, is more dangerous than mining (15.1 deaths per 100,000 workers) or construction (9.7 deaths per 100,000 workers).
- ▶ The state of Minnesota dispatched investigators to review just 6 of the 210 farming deaths in the state during the past decade.
- ▶ By contrast, writes Meitrodt, “state and federal regulators typically review about 90 percent of construction fatalities across the United States.”

In the fourth and final segment of “Tragic Harvest,” Meitrodt examines a state with a different approach

to farm safety. In the state of Washington, small farms with under 11 employees are subject to safety rules, and the state also offers consulting services to farmers to help improve safety practices.

“The results,” writes Meitrodt, “are stunning... [O]f the 47 states that reported at least one farm death in the past decade, Washington has the nation’s lowest fatality rate.” If Washington’s robust enforcement procedures were adopted in all 50 states, according to a study in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, “the lives of about 1,000 farmworkers could be saved in five years.”

Both Minnesota and Washington administer health and safety programs at the state level. These and other State Plan jurisdictions can go beyond OSHA requirements—such as applying safety regulations to establishments with ten or fewer workers.

“Tragic Harvest” includes a database, with links to obituaries, of 211 farm deaths in Minnesota between 2004 and 2014.

Jeffrey Meitrodt is investigative news editor at the *Star Tribune*. Other contributors from the *Star Tribune* staff include photographer and videographer **Renée Jones Schneider**, interactive data journalist **Jeff Hargarten** and graphic artist **Billy Steve Clayton**.

DEATH ON A FARM

In 2014, **BRAD BRAUN** was killed on a family farm owned by his father, Don Braun. Brad was moving a 1,200-pound bale of hay with a 1952 International Harvester tractor. The machine tipped over, landing on Brad and crushing him to death. The 62-year old machine was not equipped with rollover protection available on current—and more expensive—models.



TRAGIC HARVEST



Print, Internet and Broadcast Stories:

INSIDE CORPORATE AMERICA'S CAMPAIGN TO DITCH WORKERS' COMP

National Public Radio and ProPublica.org by Howard Berkes and Michael Grabell

Oct. 14, 2015

This joint investigation looks at an effort by firms in Dallas and Oklahoma—backed by an attorney and lobbyist named Bill Minick—to opt-out of state-based workers' comp systems, replacing them with private schemes written and administered by employers.

Grabell and Berkes conducted the first-ever outside review of these private compensation plans. Their conclusion: "The plans almost universally have lower benefits, more restrictions [than public workers' compensation systems] and virtually no independent oversight."

Other key findings:

- ▶ "Unlike traditional workers' comp, which guarantees lifetime medical care, the Texas plans cut off treatment after about two years."
- ▶ "The plans in both Texas and Oklahoma give employers almost complete control over the medical and legal process after workers get injured. Workers must accept whatever is offered or lose all benefits. If they wish to appeal, they can—to a committee set up by their employers."
- ▶ "[W]ith a coalition led by executives from Walmart, Nordstrom and Lowe's, Minick has launched a campaign to get laws passed in as many as a dozen states within the next decade."
- ▶ In Texas and Oklahoma, where his lobbying efforts to privatize workers' comp have been successful, Minick's consulting firm—PartnerSource—has won a lion's share of the new markets he helped create.
- ▶ "PartnerSource hooks companies up with insurance carriers, claim administrators, medical networks and defense lawyers. [Minick's firm] writes about 50 percent of the opt-out plans in Texas and nearly 90 percent in Oklahoma, alone covering more workers than 14 state programs."

A companion interactive database to this story, "Price Check: How Companies Value Body Parts," shows how much different companies pay for the loss of specific body parts under privatized workers' compensation schemes. A worker who loses a finger at Costco, for example, would receive \$15,000, while a worker at Walmart would receive \$25,000.

Michael Grabell covers economics and labor issues at ProPublica, a non-profit news website. **Howard Berkes** is a correspondent for NPR's investigative unit. **Emily Martinez**, a ProPublica design fellow, produced the story; NPR intern **Courtney Mabeus** also contributed. **Lana Groeger** of ProPublica worked with Grabell on the "Price Check" database.



Photo: Nick Oxford, ProPublica.org

WORKERS PAY FOR PRIVATIZATION

In March 2014, **RACHEL JENKINS** severely injured her shoulder while working as a job coach and personal care aide at an Oklahoma facility operated by ResCare. The company provides services for the physically and mentally disabled. A man attacked her client, and Jenkins was thrown to the ground while trying to protect him.

The private workers' compensation plan operated by ResCare denied her benefits for a work-related injury. A doctor flown in by the company from Arizona reviewed her case and diagnosed "wearing of her rotator cuff caused by aging." As Grabell and Berkes report, "Jenkins is 32."

Print, Internet and Broadcast Stories:

INSIDE CORPORATE AMERICA'S CAMPAIGN TO DITCH WORKERS' COMP

COMPANIES

OPT OUT

of WORKERS' COMP?

- Nearly **120 opt-out companies** in Texas and Oklahoma
- **1.5 million** workers in private, employer-run plans
- **Lower benefits**, no independent oversight
- No lifetime **medical care** for work-related injuries
- When workers are hurt, employers control the medical and **legal** process



OUTSTANDING HEALTH AND SAFETY STORIES, 2016

Source: ProPublica, National Public Radio

Print, Internet and Broadcast Stories:

COMMON SOLVENT KEEPS KILLING WORKERS, CONSUMERS

Center for Public Integrity and Slate.com by **Jamie Smith Hopkins** Oct. 21, 2015

This investigative piece describes the hazards of methylene chloride, a common ingredient in paint strippers. Co-published at Slate.com, the story is part of “Unequal Risk,” a Center for Public Integrity (CPI) series highlighting risks faced by American workers.

Paint strippers with methylene chloride as an ingredient, Hopkins reports, are widely available in hardware and home improvement stores. The products are commonly used by workers and consumers, although methylene chloride is a known carcinogen that can also cause sudden death by asphyxiation or heart failure when used in confined spaces.

CPI’s investigation found 56 deaths linked to exposure to methylene chloride since 1980:

Teenagers on the job, a mother of four, workers nearing retirement, an 80-year-old man—the toxic vapors took them all. A Colorado resident... was killed his first day at a furniture-stripping shop. Three South Carolina workers were felled in a single incident in 1986. Church maintenance employee Steve Duarte, 24, survived the Iraq War only to be killed in 2010 while stripping a baptismal pool in California.

Additional key findings:

- ▶ Methylene chloride is a particular hazard for workers who use it to strip old paint or other finishes from residential bathtubs, as this work often takes place in settings with poor ventilation. A 2012 report from the Centers for Disease Control, cited by CPI, identifies 13 deaths among bathtub refinishers between 2001 and 2011.
- ▶ “The European Union pulled methylene chloride paint strippers from general use in 2011. U.S. agencies have neither banned the product nor required better warnings, despite decades of evidence about the dangers—though the Environmental Protection Agency is now considering regulation.”
- ▶ “Industry is lobbying against a potential EPA rule... saying the chemical is well-regulated and the most effective way to remove paint.”

Jamie Smith Hopkins is an environmental and labor reporter at the Center for Public Integrity. **Joe Dodd** provided photographs for the story.



Photo: Joe Dodd

DEATH FROM METHYLENE CHLORIDE

Rita Welch’s son **JOHNATHAN WELCH** was 18 years old in 1999 when he was killed from exposure to methylene chloride at Dip’n Strip, a small furniture business near Chattanooga Tennessee. He started the job while still in high school at age 16. Before the incident that killed him, he had symptoms of dizziness and on one occasion passed out at work.

On Aug 18, 1999—a week before he was supposed to start college—Johnathan was working through lunch at Dip’n Strip when the fumes from a tank he was working over overcame him, “stealing oxygen from his brain, stopping his heart... Doctors tried to save him, but Johnathan was brain dead. Chemical inhalation, according to their diagnosis, had starved him of oxygen. The next day Rita Welch and her ex-husband agreed to take him off life support.”

Welch is one of 56 people identified by the Center for Public Integrity who have died from exposure to methylene chloride since 1980.

Print, Internet and Broadcast Stories:

COMMON SOLVENT KEEPS KILLING WORKERS, CONSUMERS

A SILENT KILLER?



METHYLENE CHLORIDE is a common ingredient in paint strippers used by workers and consumers. It is widely available in hardware and home improvement stores.

The European Union **banned** the chemical in paint strippers for general use in 2011, but no regulations in the U.S. limit the use of methylene chloride.

- **56 deaths** linked to exposure since 1980.
- **13 deaths** among bathtub refinishers from 2001 –2011.
- More than **2,700** calls to U.S. poison control centers in the five years ending in 2013.



Source: *Center for Public Integrity/Slate*, "Common solvent keeps killing workers, consumers," October 2015

Print, Internet and Broadcast Stories:

SAFETY LAPSES AND DEATHS AMID A BUILDING BOOM IN NEW YORK

New York Times by **David W. Chen** Nov. 26, 2015

This story is based on a review of all construction fatalities in New York City over the past two years. It shows increases in deaths and injuries at a far greater rate than the increase in construction permits over the same time period, suggesting that safety standards have become lax during the city's recent construction boom.

Non-union and immigrant workers are most at risk, Chen reports:

The rise in deaths and injuries—mostly among undocumented immigrant laborers—far exceeds the rate of new construction over the same period. It is stark evidence of the view increasingly held by safety inspectors, government officials and prosecutors, that safety measures at these job sites are woefully inadequate...

The deaths make clear that the city is being built, or in some cases rebuilt, heavily on the backs of recent immigrants, particularly from Latin America, most of them not authorized to work in this country... many were especially vulnerable because of their legal status. They were frequently poorly trained, paid in cash and afraid of speaking up about unsafe

conditions, according to records and interviews with friends and relatives.

Other key findings:

- ▶ “There were 10 construction-related fatalities in the most recent fiscal year, from July 2014 to July 2015... In contrast, the annual average over the previous four years was 5.5.”
- ▶ “324 workers were injured in the last fiscal year, a jump of 53 percent...”
- ▶ “[T]he Buildings Department recorded 314 accidents over all, an increase of 52 percent from the year before. The total was more than two and a half times what the city tallied in 2011.”
- ▶ “In comparison, permits for new construction projects grew by only 11 percent in the last fiscal year and permits for renovation and other work by 6 percent.”

David W. Chen is a metro investigative reporter at *The New York Times*. Reporting for this story was contributed by **Kim Barker**, **Veera Kaur**, **Ken Schwencke** and **Isvett Verde**, and research by **Susan C. Beachy**.



DEATH ON A NEW YORK CONSTRUCTION SITE

Construction worker **MANUEL COLORADO**, 36, died at a worksite in Brooklyn on March 6, 2014. He fell two stories while attempting to pass corrugated metal to his co-workers; neither Colorado nor several other workers were wearing safety harnesses.

U.S. OSHA fined Adar Steel, Colorado's employer, \$53,200. But the company did not pay the fine and continued its construction operations. In April, the company was fined again—and again did not pay—for safety lapses at a building site in Harlem “that lacked guardrails, safety nest, or other protection.”

Print, Internet and Broadcast Stories:

SAFETY LAPSES AND DEATHS AMID A BUILDING BOOM IN NEW YORK



NYC BUILDING BOOM SAFETY BUST!

Between June 2014–July 2015, increases in construction deaths and injuries in New York City greatly outpaced the increase in construction permits. *The New York Times* reports, “The city is being built, or in some cases rebuilt, heavily on the backs of recent immigrants... poorly trained, paid in cash and afraid of speaking up about unsafe conditions.”

↑ Fatalities
nearly doubled
10 workers
killed

↑ Injuries
increased 53%
324 workers
injured

↑ Incidents
in the workplace
increased 52%
314 incidents

Source: *New York Times*, “Safety Lapses Amid a Building Boom in New York,” November, 2015

Print, Internet and Broadcast Stories:

IRRADIATED—THE HIDDEN LEGACY OF 70 YEARS OF ATOMIC WEAPONRY: AT LEAST 33,480 AMERICANS DEAD

McClatchy Newspapers by Rob Hotakainen, Lindsay Wise, Frank Matt and Samantha Ehlinger Dec. 11, 2015

This four-part series investigates the health of workers who were exposed to radioactive substances while building America's nuclear arsenal. These stories also look at a federal program, established in 1991, to compensate nuclear workers for work-related diseases.

"Irradiated" features a database of more than 100,000 workers who have filed for federal compensation for work-related injuries.



Photo: Gerry Melendez, *TheState.com*

DEATH FROM RADIATION

GEORGE SMITH ANDERSON—known to everyone as Smitty—worked for 17 years at the U.S. Department of Energy's Savannah River site. Diagnosed with multiple myeloma—"cancer in his brain, his bones, everywhere north of his knees"—Smitty was certain he became sick as a result of exposure to radiation on the job.

"He often climbed into tanker trucks that had carried contaminated water, getting on his hands and knees to wipe them clean, with no protective suit on," reports McClatchy. "He said he wished he had questioned supervisors who told him that everything was safe."

But Smitty was denied benefits by the federal program established to compensate nuclear workers for job-related illnesses and injuries. He died on Nov. 5, 2015, at age 62.

Key findings:

▶ "[T]he great push to win the Cold War has left a legacy of death on American soil: At least 33,480 former nuclear workers who received compensation are dead. The death toll is more than four times the number of American casualties in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq."

▶ "[F]ewer than half of those who've applied [for work-related compensation] have received any money. Workers complain that they're often left in bureaucratic limbo, flummoxed by who gets payments, frustrated by long wait times and overwhelmed by paperwork."

▶ "Stronger safety standards have not stopped accidents or day-to-day radiation exposure. More than 186,000 workers have been exposed since 2001."

The Investigative Fund of The Nation Institute, a non-profit media center based in New York City, supported "Irradiated."

Rob Hotakainen and **Lindsay Wise** are national correspondents at McClatchy Newspapers' Washington, DC bureau. **Frank Matt** was the lead data reporter for the series. **Samantha Ehlinger** is a former McClatchy Intern.

Additional reporting and writing for "Irradiated" was contributed by **Mike Fitzgerald**, *Belleville News-Democrat*; **Rocky Barker**, *Idaho Statesman*; **Sammy Fretwell**, *The State of Columbia, S.C.*; **Yamil Berard**, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*; **Scott Canon**, *Kansas City Star*; and **Annette Cary**, *Tri-City Herald*. Photography by **Brittany Peterson**, **Gerry Melendez**, **Ali Rizvi**, **Wade Payne**, **Otto Kitsinger**, **Tim Vizer**, **David Bowser**, **Chad Estes**, **Mike Fitzgerald**, **Cheryl Diaz Meyer**.

Graphics, development and design by **Danny Dougherty**. Editing by **James Asher** and copy editing by **Mike Bold**.

Print, Internet and Broadcast Stories:

**IRRADIATED—THE HIDDEN LEGACY OF 70 YEARS OF
ATOMIC WEAPONRY: AT LEAST 33,480 AMERICANS DEAD**

More than **33,000** former nuclear workers
have died

after receiving compensation for occupational injuries.

**NUCLEAR
RADIATION** 

DEATH TOLL

**MORE THAN 4 TIMES U.S. CASUALTIES
IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN**

107,000 former nuclear workers have filed for compensation for work-related illness or injury.

Only 53,000 have been approved to receive benefits, at a cost of \$12 billion.

More than 186,000 workers exposed to radiation since 2001.

Source: *McClatchy Newspapers*, "Irradiated: The Hidden Legacy of 70 years of Atomic Weaponry," December, 2015



Making Work Safer

Local COSH groups advocate, research, train, and organize so workers can exercise their right to a safe and healthy workplace. Below is a snapshot of the past year's activities, from union halls to city halls across the country.

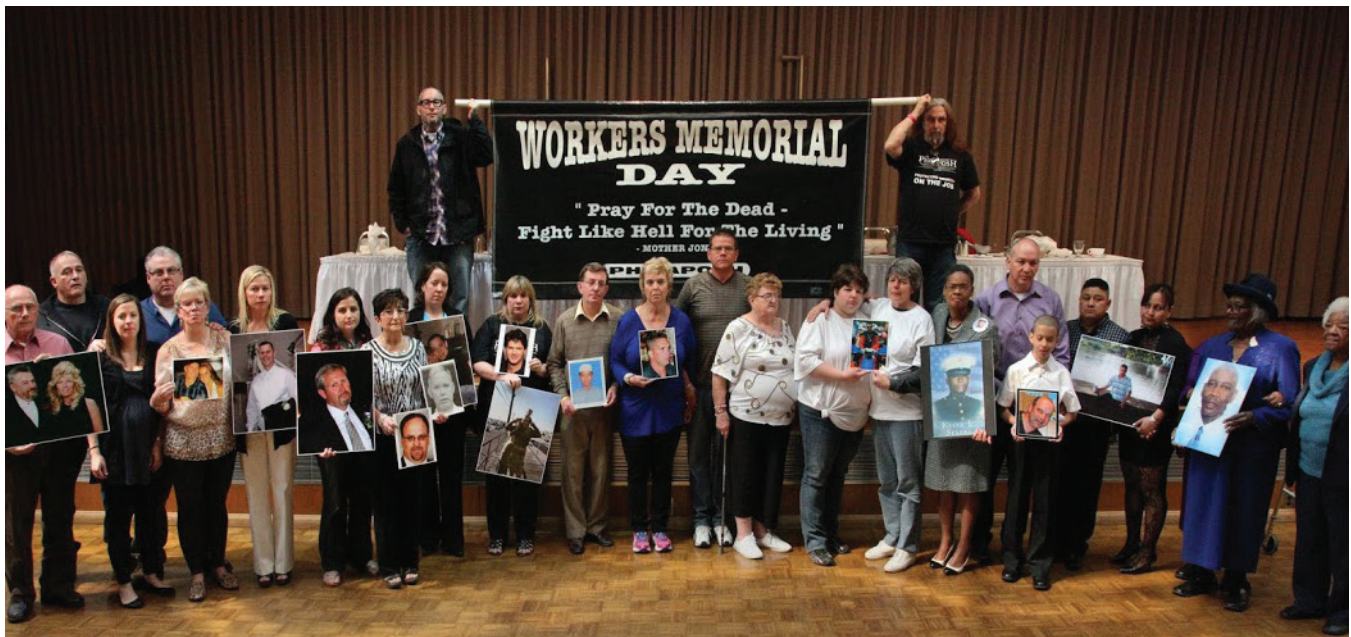
The **Central/Northern NY Occupational Health Clinical Centers** created a new injured workers group; produced a second report from the Low Wage Workers Health Project; responded with allies to Governor Cuomo's Task Force on low-wage workers; sponsored a Workers' Memorial Day breakfast and community theater group play about the "Radium Girls;" and—with the Workers' Center of Central New York and the Workers Justice Center—organized for dairy farmworkers' rights.

ConnectiCOSH addressed workplace assault and violence through its "Shatter the Silence" conferences;

worked with the Connecticut AFL-CIO to oppose privatization and "Right to Work" with the theme: "An attack on unions is an attack on safety."

Fe y Justicia rallied in Washington, DC in support of a new OSHA rule on worker exposure to silica dust; participated in the Hyundai Day of Action, taking action in Houston in support of workers facing hazards at an auto parts plant in Selma, Alabama; and released a report detailing the deaths of over 60 Texas workers who died on the job.

The **Knoxville Area Workers' Memorial Day Committee** published the report "Tennessee Workers: Dying for a Job;" participated in the Hyundai Day of Action in support of autoworkers in Selma, Alabama; and is working with the Tennessee Department of Transportation to develop a program for screening bidders on construction contracts and overseeing safety practices on projects awarded.



The **Maine Labor Group on Health** advocated for responsible employer provisions in Augusta, Maine city contracts, and for a more robust response to worker fatalities from the State Attorney General's office.

MassCOSH provided immigrant workers with “muck and gut” trainings to protect themselves while cleaning up storm damage caused by climate change; led a coalition that successfully pushed the Massachusetts State Senate to approve a bill expanding eligibility and compensation for injured workers; and co-authored a national report on health and safety for recycling workers.

Midstate COSH began a Teens Lead @ Work program, using a “train the trainer” approach to teach and empower thirty-three working teens in mid-state New York.

NENYCOSH continued to grow in its second year. The group conducted numerous trainings of vulnerable workers, including inner-city youth and recent immigrants, and organized public advocacy events, including a screening of an award-winning documentary about temp workers, “A Day's Work.”

New Hampshire COSH provided safety training for workers, from handling hazardous materials to preventing workplace violence; advocated for safety training for temporary workers; and engaged in outreach to vulnerable populations including young workers and immigrants.

New Jersey Work Environment Council partnered with the New Jersey State Industrial Council to organize twenty-five community, labor and environmental groups to sign on to a friend of the court brief and help win a Supreme Court decision to uphold a landmark whistleblower law; continued to press for emergency response plans and the need for the public to have access to crude oil train information; and, through their growing Healthy Schools Now Coalition, demanded action to ensure that all New Jersey students and educators learn and work in healthy schools.

NYCOSH launched the “Health for Heroes” campaign on behalf of 9/11 first responders and survivors; advocated for continuance of the Scaffold Safety Law; released the reports “Health and Hardship:



Untold Stories from 9/11's Unsung Heroes” and “The Price of Life: 2015 Report on Construction Fatalities in NYC;” and—in a coalition with Adhikaar and other workers rights advocates—won protections for nail salon workers in New York state.

PhilaPOSH's Criminal Prosecution Committee focused on a new initiative from the U.S Departments of Justice and Labor to prosecute employers who lie to OSHA compliance officers conducting fatality investigations. One contractor in Philadelphia was sentenced to jail time for lying after an employee's death.

Rhode Island COSH made policy recommendations on a possible Ebola outbreak in the United States; successfully advocated that the U.S. Green Building Council implement worker and safety health into its design protocols; and allied with unions, housing advocates, and health professionals to restore state funding for a lead poisoning prevention program.

SoCalCOSH advocated with Cal/OSHA on behalf of hotel housekeepers; worked with the Don't Waste LA coalition to ensure a good health and safety record for companies awarded hauling contracts with the city of Los Angeles; implemented a service learning program with the UCLA School of Public Health; and co-released reports on “Safe and Sustainable Recycling” and “Cleaning Up Waste and Recycling Management.”

South Florida COSH expanded its worker health and safety training program to assist low-wage workers; engaged in outreach to Latino and Haitian workers; and wrote the report “Workplace deaths in Florida with a focus on Southeast Florida.”

Western MassCOSH engaged in a grass-roots campaign to support legislation expanding employee-safety laws to include all public sector workers in the state.

Worksafe engaged in a grassroots campaign to build support for a workplace violence standard in California; successfully advocated that the California Department of Industrial Relations take the cases of workers who were retaliated against after being injured at work; and authored the report “Dying at Work in California.”

WNYCOSH released the report “Fatal Falls: The Downside of the Construction Boom,” which argued that New York’s Scaffold Safety Law must be maintained; advocated for safer working conditions for 7-Eleven employees; and—in collaboration with unions, community-based organizations and health care professionals—helped establish the Center for Occupational and Environmental Medicine in Buffalo.

Wyoming COSH worked to keep safe workplaces a top issue in the upcoming elections; educated policy-makers and the public about needed protections for working people; and created a webinar presentation on strategies for outreach to family members of deceased workers.

ENDNOTES

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7 Jukka Takala, “Eliminating Workplace Cancer,” *Industrial Health*, May 2015



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