

President's 2006 Worker Memorial Day Message

On April 28, workers and their unions from throughout the world will pause to remember the thousands of workers killed and injured in the workplace over the past year. I ask each of you to take the time this Workers' Memorial Day to honor our fallen Brothers and Sisters.

Each year in the U.S., approximately 6,000 workers are killed at work, 50,000 die from occupational illnesses, and millions more are injured. During 2005, 25 U.S. railroad workers were killed on duty, including 5 fatalities in maintenance of way and structures. Another 5,451 rail workers suffered reportable injuries, including 1,127 employed in maintenance of way and structures. These on-duty fatalities/injuries do not include an undetermined number of rail employees who suffer or have succumbed to railroad-related occupational illnesses and disease during 2005.

In addition, 845 people (non-railroad employees) were killed in rail accidents/incidents during 2004, including 354 fatalities at highway rail grade crossings, and another 491 fatalities suffered by those classified as "trespassers and non-trespassers."

We will honor the victims of workplace death and injury by holding employers accountable for the protection of workers' safety and health. We call for action on meaningful job safety protection laws, demand aggressive enforcement of existing laws, and a halt to the dilution of safety regulations by our government and its agencies. We affirm that nothing is more important than assuring a workplace free of hazards so that our members can return home from work in the same condition as when they left.

Please join me in honoring our dead by pausing to remember their ultimate sacrifice this Workers' Memorial Day. Let us then redouble our efforts to eliminate death and injury in the workplace. In the words of labor pioneer Mother Jones, "Mourn for the dead, and fight like hell for the living."