



**NEWS** from the ESPC

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## **Wyoming Workers Memorial Day set April 29** *State, national, safety advocates call for stronger OSHA enforcement*

A Wyoming commemoration of Workers' Memorial Day will take place on Monday, April 29, at the Ramada Plaza Riverside in Casper.

The program, which will begin at 8 a.m., will feature speakers discussing the need for stronger workplace safety laws statewide and across the nation; how a job-related death affects a family and others; progress that Wyoming regulators have made in improving workplace safety; and the need for more workplace safety investigations.

More than 4,600 workers were killed on the job in the United States in 2011 – the latest year for which we have complete data, and in Wyoming, 29 workers were killed on the job that year. An analysis by the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health (National COSH) found Wyoming had the worst rate of worker fatalities in the country from 2005-10 and that its 6-year average was at least double the average fatality rate in all but eight other states. The state's fatality rate in 2011 was second worst in the U.S., trailing only North Dakota.

The number of job deaths in Wyoming dropped in 2012. State officials report that 23 workers were killed in events in Wyoming's oil and gas fields, on construction sites, highways, and on its ranches.

The National COSH released its report, "Preventable Deaths: The Tragedy of Workplace Fatalities," this week as part of Workers Memorial Week. The report pairs government data with heart-breaking stories about worker fatalities to portray the need for worker health and safety reforms.

David Morgan, (65) of Casper, was killed on the job in August 2012 when he was crushed by a 4,000-pound storage container that contained gasoline additives at the Baker Hughes building. He had been only weeks away from his retirement. Morgan's widow, Katherine Morgan, will speak at the Casper memorial event. She believes it's important to recognize the impact of job deaths.

"The loss is not to just our families, it's to our communities and our state," she said.

Other speakers at the event include Riverton attorney and former mayor John Vincent, long an advocate for safety in the oil and gas patch; John Ysebaert, administrator of the Department of Workforce Services Office of Standards and Compliance; Mark Aronowitz, an attorney for SAFER, the Spence Association for Employee Rights; and two state legislators, Rep. Don Burkhart of Rawlins, and Sen. John Hastert of Green River.

“We hope this commemoration will honor those Wyoming workers who perished on the job and remind everyone of the work needed to ensure that our workers return safe and whole from every shift,” said Dan Neal, director of the Equality State Policy Center.

“We support the state’s efforts to hire more inspectors and encourage companies to start up and advance safety programs,” said Kim Floyd, executive secretary of the Wyoming State AFL-CIO. “We also know that strong enforcement efforts make jobs safer. Enforcement should be a top priority at OSHA.”

Neal noted that Wyoming inspectors could do more if the state required drilling companies to report when they move to a new well location and begin drilling. At present, there’s no central reporting point to inform state inspectors exactly where drilling rigs are making holes. “Simply reporting a GPS location to OSHA when drilling starts and when a drilling company departs a completed well would suffice.”

“Each worker killed is a tragic loss to the community of family, friends and co-workers – and the worst part is, these deaths were largely preventable,” said Tom O’Connor, executive director of National COSH. “Simply by following proven safety practices and complying with OSHA standards, many of these more than 4,600 deaths could have been avoided. But as companies decry regulations and emphasize profits over safety, workers pay the ultimate price.”

The National COSH report points to the following reforms that are needed:

- State legislation to implement minimum penalty amounts for serious safety citations related to workplace fatalities, which can be modeled after Minnesota’s legislation that requires its state OSHA program to levy fines of no less than \$25,000 for every serious violation and, in cases involving repeat or willful violations, no less than \$50,000.
- Meaningful immigration reform, which would bring undocumented workers out of the shadows and give them protections afforded to all workers.
- A stronger Occupational Safety and Health Act, which would make felony charges possible when repeat or willful violations result in a worker's death or serious injury, and would increase the penalties OSHA can impose on negligent employers.
- An Injury and Illness Prevention Standard, which would require employers to find and fix health and safety hazards in the workplace.
- States should examine health impacts from silica dust during hydraulic fracturing and consider possible state regulations.
- And many other reforms reviewed in the report.

Wyoming Workers Memorial Day is sponsored by the Wyoming State AFL-CIO, the Wyoming Trial Lawyers Association, the Spence Association for Employee Rights (SAFER), and a new project of the Equality State Policy Center, the Wyoming Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health: WyCOSH.

To see the full National COSH report, visit <http://www.coshnetwork.org/workers-memorial-day-report-2013-preventable-deaths-tragedy-workplace-fatalities>. Visit [www.workersmemorialweek.org](http://www.workersmemorialweek.org) for more information.

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*The Equality State Policy Center, a broad-based coalition of Wyoming interests, works through research, public education and advocacy to hold Wyoming state and local governments accountable to the people they represent, and to encourage and assist state residents to participate effectively in public policy decision-making. The National Council for Occupational Safety and Health is a federation of local and statewide organizations; a private, non-profit coalition of labor unions, health and technical professionals, and others interested in promoting and advocating for worker health and safety.*