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Families Urge Faster Action on Life-Saving Job Safety Rules

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Mike Hall

Today in a Senate hearing room usually filled with sharp-suited lobbyists and other Capitol Hill insiders, more than two dozen family survivors of workers killed on the job took the front row seats. They stood and faced the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee and held photographs for lawmakers to see—images of their fathers, mothers, wives, husbands, sons and daughters.

“The pictures that you hold,” said committee chairman Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa),

are the faces that we should remember every time we hear that safety rules are too burdensome or that regulations cost jobs.

The Senate held the hearing in conjunction with Workers Memorial Day, April 28. It focused on the innumerable delays and roadblocks new safety standards from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) must clear before becoming law. On average, it takes eight years for a new rule to be approved—which Harkin described as resulting not from cumbersome bureaucracy but is the result of relentless external pressure from business lobbyists and anti-labor groups. These groups pressure both OSHA and OMB to create delays that cost lives.

An OSHA silica exposure standard has stalled 14 years after work on it began—even though the dangers of exposure to silica dust and the crippling and fatal lung disease it causes have been known for decades. Meanwhile, dust explosions from grain silos and sugar factories continue to kill and maim.

Tom Ward, a Michigan Bricklayer (BAC) knows firsthand about the dangers of silica. His father died of silicosis when Ward was just 13. He told the committee:

In his twenties he worked as a sandblaster for five or six years...then just a few years into his new job he started getting short of breath. We got the official diagnosis—silicosis—when he was 34 years-old. It took five years for of silicosis to kill him. It was a slow and painful process.

Tammy Miser's brother Shawn, 33, was killed in an aluminum dust explosion in 2003. Later she described in detail the severe burns, externally and internally, her brother suffered in the days after the explosion before he died. She said she made the trip to Washington because:

We need to have these regulations passed now to protect the workers and protect families from a having to go through what we went through.

Tomorrow, the workers and family members will demonstrate outside the offices of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to protest the Chamber's role in blocking new workplace safety standards. Says Harkin:

Today, rather than hearing outrage over worker deaths, we hear misinformation campaigns from corporate lobbyists about OSHA supposedly killing jobs. We see legislative proposals that call for blanket prohibitions on new regulations and proposals to add even more red tape to the regulatory process...We must come up with ways for OSHA to do its job without intimidation or interference.

[Click here for testimony for the witnesses and a video of the hearing.](#)

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