

Press Release from New Labor & New Jersey Work Environment Council

Hundreds of Workers and Allies Rally and March to Demand Safe Working Conditions

Contact: Lou Kimmel
732-762-7687
lkimmel@newlabor.org

Dan Fatton
609-882-6100
dfatton@njwec.org

For Immediate Release, April 24, 2016:

On Sunday, April 24th, hundreds of workers from community organizations, unions, and faith-based groups rallied in New Brunswick, NJ to observe Workers' Memorial Day, an internationally recognized event held annually to commemorate those who have been killed or injured on the job and to renew the fight for safe workplaces.

The rally and spirited march focused on the demand for **RESPECT, including safe work and a living wage**. New Labor and the New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC) helped organize the event, which included 35 other organizations as endorsers.

WEC Board President Reverend Fletcher Harper, Executive Director of GreenFaith, said, "Every worker is entitled to a hazard-free workplace. There is no reason that families should be afraid that mom or dad will not come home after a day on the job."

Workers' Memorial Day commemorates the date that the Occupational Safety and Health Act went into effect, April 28. The Act was designed to ensure that workers have safe and healthy working conditions. Yet, each year thousands of workers are killed and millions more suffer work-related injuries and disease. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 4,679 workers were killed on the job in 2014 and 50,000 died from workplace injuries the year before. In 2015, 36 workers were killed on the job right here in New Jersey.

“We are here today to remember those who have lost their lives and to Make sure that worker safety trumps the bottom line,” said John Shinn, Director, United Steelworkers District 4, and WEC Board member.

“When it comes to health and safety, we’re all in this together. We won’t stop fighting until we secure safe workplaces for all,” added Germania Hernandez of New Labor.

“Our workers provide life-saving services,” said Bernie Gerard, Vice President of the Health Professional and Allied Employees (HPAE). “It is inconceivable that by doing so, they are risking their own safety and in some cases their own lives.”

Workers continue to find themselves at great risk of exposure to dangerous workplace conditions. In one recent tragic example at a Whippany firehouse, two workers died after being crushed by a 10,000 pound generator, which fell from a crane at the construction site. Despite progress in reducing the number of incidents, workers continue to be injured on the job, and even today not all injuries are reported.

The respect for workers that is necessary includes the need to make a living wage. Both WEC and New Labor support the *Fight for \$15* to raise New Jersey’s minimum wage to \$15, which will benefit working families. 75% of minimum wage earners are age 20 or older; more than 25% are parents and a majority of them are the primary or only providers for their household.

“An hourly minimum wage of \$8.38 is not realistic in today’s economy, particularly in an expensive state like New Jersey. Workers have the right to a safe workplace, but respecting workers also means paying them an actual living wage,” said Dan Fatton, WEC Executive Director.

“We have a lot of temp workers who are members of New Labor, and we want to make sure that their agencies are jointly responsible for working conditions. That’s why we marched today,” said Reynalda Cruz of New Labor.

Another feature of the April 24th Workers' Memorial Day is the unveiling of the Art for Dignity Mobile Mural Project. The community will come together with artist Willis Nomo to depict the need for safe working conditions and for RESPECT.

About New Labor

New Labor is a membership-based organization of largely low-wage Latino workers that educates, organizes, and fights for better working conditions. For more information, please visit www.newlabor.org.

About NJWEC

The NJ Work Environment Council is an alliance of 70 labor, community, and environmental organizations advocating for safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment. For more information, please visit www.njwec.org.

Event Endorsers

United Steelworkers District 4, New Jersey Education Association, Health Professionals and Allied Employees (HPAE), HP AE Local 5094, The Labor Institute, AFTNJ, 1199 SEIU UHWE, UFCW 888, Greater NJ CLUW, CWA 1037, New Jersey Communities United, New Jersey State Industrial Union Council, Teamsters Local 469, Rutgers USAS, GreenFaith, New Brunswick Area Branch NAACP, Ironbound Community Corporation, Food & Water Watch, Central Jersey Coalition Against Endless War, National Staffing Workers Alliance, NJ Working Families Alliance, Workers Justice Project, Make the Road NY, New Jersey Citizen Action, AFSC Immigrant Rights Program, Casa Freehold, Esperanza Neighborhood Project, Pennsylvania Federation BMWED-IBT, Unidad Latina en Acción, \$15 NOW NJ, Coalition for Healthy Ports, Make the Road NJ, Clean Water Action, Professional Firefighters Association of New Jersey IAFF, AFL-CIO, Unity Square, Social Justice Committee of the Unitarian Society (East Brunswick)