

Coalition for Hispanic Worker Safety

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Hispanic Immigrant Safety Advocates Denounce Bogus OSHA "Summit"

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For list of endorsing organizations, see end of release

July 22, 2004

Twenty-five organizations around the country delivered a letter today to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) indicating that they would not attend the "Hispanic Safety and Health Summit," taking place today in Orlando, Fla. Representatives from worker safety advocacy organizations, labor groups, and Hispanic organizations denounced the meeting organized by the Bush Administration as a blatant election year play for Hispanic votes.

In their letter to OSHA, members of the Coalition for Hispanic Worker Safety noted that the conference was organized with virtually no input from major Hispanic advocacy organizations or grassroots worker groups. "This is clearly not a serious effort to address the epidemic of workplace injuries and illnesses suffered by our community," said Jayesh Rathod, Staff Attorney of CASA of Maryland. Planners chose not to invite groups like ours because they knew we would raise serious concerns about the administration's dismantling of workplace safety rules," Rathod added.

Immigrant workers from Mexico and Central America were 64% more likely than all workers to be killed on the job over a five year period analyzed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (*Monthly Labor Review*, June, 2004.)

Immigrant advocates noted that the only Hispanic organizations listed as conference sponsors or participants are the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and a group that calls itself the "Hispanic Alliance for Progress." The latter organization's only known activities have been promoting the Bush administration's immigration plan. The group is led by former Republican Congressman Manny Lujan, Interior Secretary in the first Bush administration.

Other advocates criticized OSHA's record of protecting Latino workers. "If OSHA were serious about protecting Latino workers, it would restore the drastic funding cuts to community based health and safety programs; programs proven to be immensely successful in reaching out and educating the Latino community to prevent workplace injuries and illnesses," said Eliseo Medina, Vice President of SEIU, the largest union in the AFL-CIO and the largest union of immigrant workers.

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“OSHA has failed to take even the small step of clarifying that employers must pay for required personal protective equipment,” noted Jackie Nowell, Director of Occupational Safety and Health for the United Food and Commercial Workers Union. “For the low-wage workers that we represent, many of whom are immigrants, the extra money taken out of their paychecks for necessary safety equipment is very significant,” she added.

Immigrant advocates also pointed out that the “Summit” lacked the participation of key leaders in the field of Hispanic health and safety. “NIOSH—the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health—was initially involved in the planning, but it seems that OSHA did not want their participation,” noted Tom O’Connor of the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health. “NIOSH has a wealth of expertise on Hispanic worker safety and should have been a key participant,” O’Connor added.

Safety professionals noted that the high level of job injuries among Hispanic workers presents serious and complex challenges. “We desperately need a serious discussion of the problem of Hispanic worker safety and an open exchange of views on how to prevent more injuries among this vulnerable group,” said Jean Carmel Sainte-Juste of the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health. “Unfortunately, this event gives no indication that it will provide a serious forum for such discussion.”

Endorsing Organizations:

AFL-CIO

Arkansas Committee on Occupational Safety and Health

Casa de Maryland

Chicago Area Committee on Occupational Safety and Health

Commonwealth Coalition (Boston, MA)

Connecticut Council on Occupational Safety and Health

International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers

Maine Labor Group on Health

Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health

Mid-State (NY) Education and Service Foundation

National Council for Occupational Safety and Health

National Council of la Raza

National Employment Law Project

New Hampshire Committee for Occupational Safety and Health

New Jersey Work Environment Council

New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health

Philadelphia Project on Occupational Safety and Health

Rhode Island Committee on Occupational Safety and Health

Service Employees International Union

Sheet Metal Workers International Association

Transport Workers Union of America

United Food and Commercial Workers International Union
Western Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health
Western New York Council on Occupational Safety and Health
Wisconsin Committee on Occupational Safety and Health

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