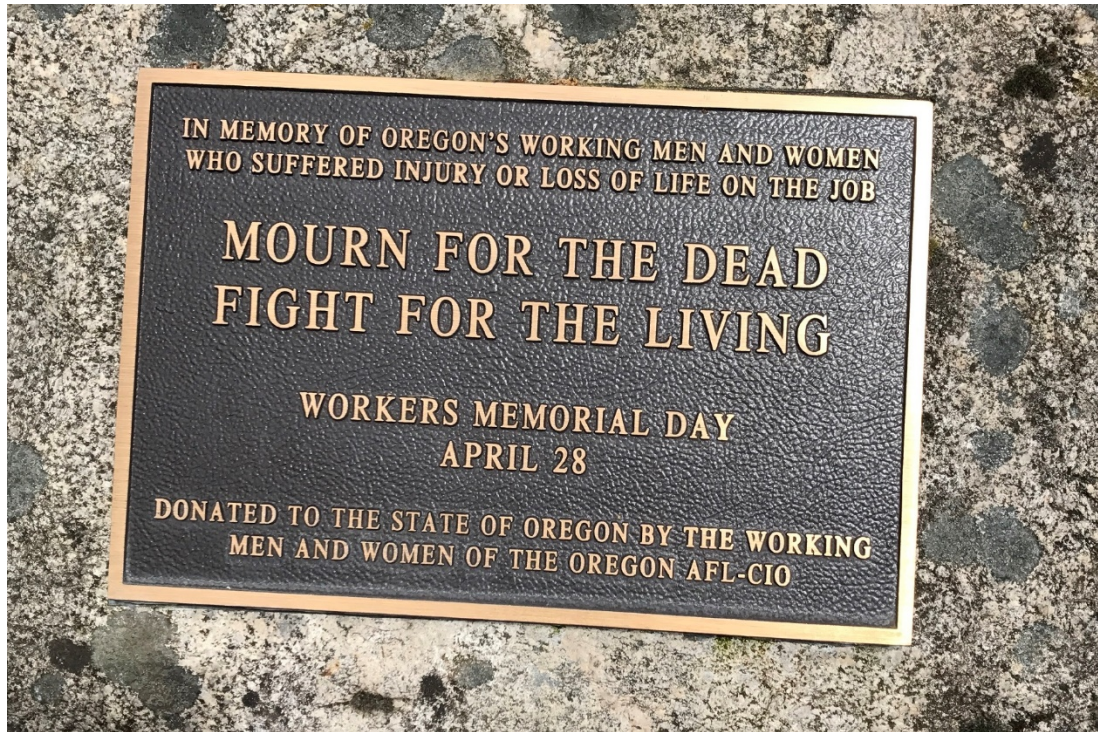


Marking Workers' Memorial Day and the OSHA's Anniversary

Submitted by Barbara Hanley, MPH, Research Associate and Fatality Investigator, Oregon Institute of Occupational Health Sciences



Fallen Workers' Memorial Plaque outside the Oregon Office of Business and Industry, Salem, OR.

This year is the 50th anniversary of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act), which created the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, known as OSHA. OSHA opened its doors on April 28th, 1971. April 28th was first designated as Workers' Memorial Day by the AFL-CIO in 1989, to remember the workers we have lost and raise awareness to prevent future workplace fatalities. The slogan adapted for Workers' Memorial Day is "*Mourn the Dead - Fight for the Living*".

April 28th as a day of remembrance for workers killed on the job is now recognized worldwide, but its origins trace back to the U.S. labor movement of the mid-20th century. The 1960s was a decade in which several national movements brought progress toward racial and gender equality, civil liberties, reducing pollution, and better worker health and safety.

The creation of OSHA was not just a good idea, it was in response to a national health crisis.

In 1968, approximately 14,000 Americans were killed in the Vietnam War, and 46,000 were wounded. That same year, 14,000 Americans were killed at work. Over 2.5 million Americans suffered disabling injuries while on the job. Fifty-four times the number of American workers were injured on the job than American soldiers were injured in Vietnam in the same year. ⁽¹⁾

In an effort to stem this tide of injury, disease and death, the U.S. Congress created the Occupational Safety and Health Act (the OSH Act), which was signed into law by President Nixon on December 29th, 1970 and went into effect on April 28th, 1971.⁽¹⁾

Before the OSH Act, there were no national laws to protect workers from workplace hazards. Workers could not compel their employer to address workplace safety and health concerns, and were not protected from retaliation for raising concerns about workplace safety conditions. When the [OSH Act](#) was signed into law in 1970, an average of 15 American workers died every day (about 14,000 per year, on average). In 2018, the U.S. labor force more than doubled since 1970,⁽²⁾ but workplace fatalities have decreased by almost two-thirds, to 5,250.⁽³⁾

The stated mission of OSHA is to save lives, prevent injuries, and protect the health of America's workers.⁽⁴⁾ To accomplish this mission, OSHA is mandated to:

- Develop job safety and health standards (regulations) and enforce standards through workplace inspections.
- Maintain a reporting and recordkeeping system to track job-related injuries and illnesses.
- Provide training programs to increase knowledge about workplace safety and health.

For a more detailed description of Federal OSHA and state-based OSHA programs (including their activities and resources), and the responsibilities and rights of employers and employees under the OSH Act, please visit the [Oregon Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation \(FACE\) program website](#).

Oregon benefits from a strong state-based OSHA, [Oregon OSHA](#), whose leaders have demonstrated strong collaboration with employers, employees, industry associations, labor groups, insurers, and researchers. Oregon OSHA's collaborations with our own Institute are illustrated by their participation and commitment to [Oregon's Total Worker Health® Alliance](#), as well as long-standing collaborations with the [Oregon FACE program](#) (funded by the CDC through NIOSH) in both occupational fatality surveillance efforts and supporting Oregon FACE fatality investigations, and published investigation reports, which identify fatality prevention recommendations.

The OSH Act, and the resulting decades of OSHA standards, resources, and activities, has had a great impact in reducing workplace injuries, illnesses and deaths in the US. But, there is still so much more to do. Every worker has the right to go home in the same health with which they came to work.

Past commemoration of Workers' Memorial Day in Oregon has been held in Salem at Fallen Workers Memorial outside the Labor and Industries Building. This year, due to COVID-19, the Oregon commemoration of Workers' Memorial Day will be held [online](#) at 12pm. Visit the [AFL-CIO Workers' Memorial Day](#) 2020 page to learn how to participate or to view the archived video of the ceremony.



Michael Wood, Administrator for OR-OSHA, speaks at the 2017 Workers' Memorial Day remembrance event in Salem, OR.

During a time with historic shelter-at-home policies in effect, we will greatly miss the opportunity to gather this year with others in Salem to renew our commitment to “mourn the dead, and fight for the living.” As Loren Sweatt, acting Assistant Secretary for OSHA said on the 2019 Workers' Memorial Day, “Workplace safety is everyone’s business, and must be everyone’s priority. Safety must start on day one and be a continuous process.”⁽⁸⁾

Recognizing that these workplace tragedies were avoidable, identifying the underlying causes, and communicating what we learn to prevent a similar tragedy, is how we honor those who lost their lives while trying to earn a living.

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