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NEW REPORT: Workplace fatalities in Massachusetts at a five year high



April 28, 2016

Click here to read the report (http://www.mediafire.com/download/mj4wiy3bay626z1/DFW_april16.pdf). **Click here to read the media coverage.** (<http://www.masscosh.org/sites/default/files/documents/total%20media%20coverage.pdf>)

On September 4, 2015, Nicholas Dumont, 24, was working inside Myles Standish Industrial Park in Taunton on a section of the warehouse's framing when a crane crashed into a steel beam, to which he was attached, knocking him 40 feet to his death. Dumont was one of 63 workers who lost their lives due to dangerous jobs in 2015, marking a five year high in worker deaths in the Commonwealth.

April 28, 2016, the Massachusetts AFL-CIO and the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSH) released a new report documenting the loss of life taking place at worksites across Massachusetts. Titled Dying for Work in Massachusetts: The Loss of Life and Limb in Massachusetts Workplaces, the 31-page report details how workers like Dumont lost their lives on the job in 2015, as well as what must be done to keep workers safe.

"I am devastated that [Nicholas] is no longer with us," said Don Dumont, father of Nicholas Dumont. "I will never get the opportunity to see him get married, have kids. I will miss the time we spent together doing things as a family and I will never get a chance to do that again with him."

The report highlights several findings, including:

- Immigrant workers accounted for 20 percent of workers killed (11 of the 63), greater than their representation in the state.
- Transportation incidents were the leading cause of fatal injuries in Massachusetts in 2015, contributing to the deaths of 23 workers. This was also the leading cause of fatal injuries in 2014.

- Falls, slips, and trips were the next most common cause of fatal injuries, killing eighteen workers and comprising 33% of the year's losses from fatal injuries. Eight of these fatal falls happened on construction jobsites. Two men fell while working to remove snow from rooftops during the winter storms of 2015.

- Violence took six workers' lives in 2015. A delivery man and a taxi driver were both robbed, shot, and killed while on the job; a doctor was shot and killed by the son of a patient; a sous chef was stabbed with a 12-inch sushi knife by a co-worker; a clerk was found shot in the parking lot of a cell phone store; and a young man participating in a job-ready program was shot and killed by a rival while shoveling snow.

The report noted Massachusetts experienced a five year high in its worker fatality rate. Between 2010 and 2014, the rate of deaths per 100,000 employees ranged from 1.0 to 1.7, in 2015; the fatality rate in 2015 was 1.9 per 100,000 employees.

"What's so disheartening about this report is that unsafe jobs are, on average, taking the life of one Massachusetts worker every week," said Marcy Goldstein-Gelb, Executive Director of MassCOSH. "That means every week, a family is reeling from the loss of a loved one and co-workers are traumatized after witnessing a death. Given that nearly all these fatalities were preventable, we urgently need to step up enforcement to deter employers from putting workers' lives at risk."

Dying for Work finds that the federal Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) is underfunded and that monetary penalties for violations of the Occupational Safety & Health Act (OSH) Act have been increased only once in 40 years despite inflation. As a result, the fines available under the OSH Act are inadequate to deter employers from creating unsafe jobs. The report also states that OSHA lacks the staffing resources to deter employers from putting their employees at risk, finding it would have taken Massachusetts inspectors 152 years to inspect each workplace under its jurisdiction.

"We mourn for those workers we lost to tragedies on the job in 2015," added Steven Tolman, President of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO. "It is imperative that all of us fight to give the Occupational Safety and Health Administration the ability to properly penalize and investigate worker safety violations and workplace conditions. Without the resources OSHA needs, we run the risk of losing more workers each year to occupational illness and accidents. The most important priority is that all workers get home safely to their families every day. Even one death on the job is too many."

The release of Dying for Work coincides with Workers' Memorial Day, an event observed around the world every year on April 28 to remember workers killed and injured on the job. In Massachusetts, Workers' Memorial Day was commemorated on the steps of the State House at noon and was observed by slain workers' family members, union representatives, safety experts, and state officials.

"Workers' Memorial Day serves as a somber reminder for the need for stronger occupational safety and health standards at the national and state level," said Rich Rogers, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Greater Boston Labor Council.

The report uncovers a wide range of measures that would avert the needless loss of life and limb, including:

- Expanding efforts to protect vulnerable workers, including temporary, subcontracted and immigrant workers, by increasing the number of multi-lingual investigators, strengthening whistleblower protections, and holding all employers responsible – including worksite hosts, staffing agencies, and subcontractors.
- Providing the Massachusetts Department of Labor Standards with the resources needed to effectively implement the new state employee health and safety law and expand these safety and health protections to encompass all public employees.
- Halting Governor Baker's Executive Order 562 that mandates a review of state regulations to prevent them from exceeding federal requirements. Many statutes, as enacted by the Legislature, were specifically designed and intended to exceed minimum federal regulations.
- Enacting laws that hold employers responsible for their subcontracted and temporary workers, and restrict city and state vendors from using temporary agencies as intermediaries with public funds.

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