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### ***Winning Safer Workplaces:***

## **CPR Releases New Manual Rich with Policy Reforms for State & Local Advocacy to Reduce Worker Deaths, Injuries, & Illnesses**

Washington, DC — More than 4,000 Americans die on the job each year, the victims of unsafe workplaces. Countless more are injured, some permanently disabled, or exposed to toxic substances that could eventually harm or kill them. While the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration has made progress since it was established in 1971, a new advocacy manual from the Center for Progressive Reform envisions that future progress on worker safety issues is likely to come at the state and local levels, far from the general dysfunction in Washington.

Written by a team of public-health researchers and lawyers with extensive experience in the health and safety arena, [\*Winning Safer Workplaces: A Manual for State and Local Policy Reform\*](#) offers state and local advocates a series of policy proposals — some new, some tried and true, but all ripe for enactment by state legislatures, city or county councils, or state or local agencies.

“A hard truth motivated us to write this manual: When it comes to advancing the cause of worker safety, Washington is simply not prepared to step up its game,” said CPR President Rena Steinzor, a lawyer and a member of the team of authors. “Congressional dysfunction makes legislation to update the 40-year-old Occupational Safety and Health Act unlikely any time soon. Underfunding, resistance by industry, and political polarization have tied OSHA up in knots. The tragic result is that workers die and are injured every day in incidents that could and should have been prevented. This manual is intended to help state and local groups — especially those new to the field of workplace health and safety — by providing them with a menu of policy proposals that they can tailor to their communities’ needs.”

“We have the knowledge and technology to protect people from such obvious and deadly hazards as collapsed trenches, heavy machinery operated without safety guards and switches, and meatpacking plants where sharp blades move too quickly for safety,” added manual co-author Liz Borkowski, a public health researcher at George Washington University’s Milken Institute School of Public Health (Milken Institute SPH). “What we lack are policies and enforcement sufficient to ensure that all employers use these well-known methods to improve workplace health and safety.”

The manual highlights several case studies where workers were killed on the job by preventable hazards:

- Two workers who died of asphyxiation in North Carolina while installing water mains, after one passed out in a low-oxygen underground space and the other tried to save him. Their employer had failed to provide adequate training on how to avoid such unsafe conditions.

- Two boys, ages 14 and 19, who were smothered in an Illinois corn silo. The boys were tamping down the grain by walking on it, after receiving just five minutes of instruction on safety procedures that made no mention of the required safety harnesses.
- A Michigan logger who was killed by a felled tree while working for an employer that had refused to provide a helmet and that permitted teams of loggers to work too closely to one another. To add insult to injury, the logger's family learned of his death not from the employer or from a safety official, but from a Facebook post. The employer was fined \$1,525, less than the profit it earned from the tree that killed its employee.

“These cases and others like them show the urgency of seizing every opportunity to reform the law, penalize scofflaws, and give workers the power to demand safer conditions,” said Celeste Monforton, a former OSHA public health expert and co-author.

The manual offers policy proposals in three broad areas:

1. **Empowering Workers** includes proposals for health and safety committees on the job so that workers can take a measure of control of their safety; safety education and training requirements so that employers will be required to give workers the information they need to be safe; whistleblower protection laws so that courageous workers won't have to risk their future to report violations; workers' "right to refuse dangerous work" laws so that insisting on safety won't cost a worker his or her job; and citizen lawsuits so that workers won't have to rely on under-resourced government agencies alone to enforce safety standards.
2. **Making Sure Crime Doesn't Pay** covers proposals that would close legal loopholes that allow employers to avoid fixing health and safety hazards while investigations and litigation are under way; expand civil penalties for violations so that endangering workers' lives is an expensive proposition; expand criminal liability so that bad actors will have personal disincentive to break the law and the punishment will match the crime; and shame scofflaw employers and industries by putting government data to work.
3. **Strengthening Institutions** spans such proposals as ensuring that police and prosecutors make workplace safety a priority; robust fatality investigations so that workplace deaths aren't swept under the rug; responsible contractor laws so that state and local governments can ensure that they only do business with companies that protect their workers; cross-agency partnerships so that agencies not principally responsible for workplace safety still report problems they encounter to those agencies that are; and annual state-level audits so that agencies are held accountable in a public way.

CPR is distributing the manual in electronic and print form to worker safety organizations across the country, and with a series of webinars slated to begin later this summer.

The manual's authors include Steinzor; CPR Policy Analysts James Goodwin, Michael Patoka, and Matthew Shultz; and Borkowski and Monforton of the Milken Institute SPH.

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