Background: The Occupational Safety & Health (OSH) Act of 1970 created the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) as part of the Department of Labor. OSHA sets standards and provides training, outreach, and assistance. The agency also enforces the requirement that employers maintain a workplace that is safe and free from hazards that will cause injury or illness to working men and women.

United Steelworkers (USW) members know first-hand both the hazards and protections that workers across the country see every day – from hard-won protections such as process safety in an oil refinery, to fall protection on an elevated walkway, to respirators in a confined space and safety needles in a hospital.

Workers Memorial Day: Every year on April 28th, we remember the workers who were killed on the job over the last year. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2014 nearly 4,700 workers were killed at work in the United States. Our union mourns the deaths of approximately 45 USW members who die at work each year. USW members have seen the devastation that occurs in a workplace and community after a workplace fatality. Sadly, these numbers do not account for the nearly 50,000 people who die each year from occupational illness.

Needed Reforms: Although the OSH Act has saved hundreds of thousands of lives since it was originally passed over 45 years ago, no significant updates have been made to the law since. Changes to the economy and the workforce necessitate changes to the law.

Many hazards are unregulated and uncontrolled. Some employers are bad actors who put workers at risk by violating the law or by contracting out dangerous work to avoid responsibility. Many workers fear retaliation from reporting hazards or injuries. As a result, thousands of workers are injured, made ill or killed each year.

Good jobs are safe jobs. The Protecting America’s Workers Act (PAWA) would help keep workers safe and promote justice for injured, sickened or deceased workers by:

- Authorizing federal prosecutions against employers who knowingly commit OSHA violations that result in death or serious bodily injury;
- Mandating that employers fix a hazard after they receive a citation even if they contest the citations;
- Requiring that OSHA investigate all cases of death and serious injuries;
- Improving whistleblower protections by increasing the time that workers have to file a complaint from 30 days to 180 days;
- Establishing rights for families of workers who were killed on the job;
- Expanding OSHA coverage to include federal employees and, in 25 states, state and local government employees; and
- Authorizing federal OSHA to have concurrent enforcement authority when a state plan fails to meet established minimum requirements.

The Protecting America’s Workers Act has been introduced in the House by Congressman Joe Courtney (D-CT-02) and in the Senate by Senator Al Franken (D-MN). This year, in honor of those who have died at work, please cosponsor the Protecting America’s Workers Act (H.R. 2090 and S. 1112).