

Workers Memorial Day “Sample” List of Ideas for Local Union Planning Committees

Your coordinator should set WMD planning meetings with dates, times and meeting place at a user friendly time and location (Note: Meetings may need to be more frequent as the ceremony date gets closer)

At the meetings, create a spreadsheet of volunteers with their contact information and their responsibilities – including target dates

- Determine the ceremony date (if you cannot hold it on April 28th).
- Determine the ceremony’s time (Morning, Noon or Evening). Make sure the time will work with workers’ and speakers’ schedules for strong attendance.
- Determine if there will be food and beverage for a snack, luncheon or dinner.

If so, make appropriate approvals with E-Board and arrangements with vendor or persons volunteering to do the cooking.

- Develop a scheduled timeline (beginning-to-end) for the entire ceremony. 30-45 minutes is most preferable.
- Secure permits if public property or park will be used. If being held at the union hall, make sure the hall is large enough for the anticipated crowd; the date is open and reserved for the WMD ceremony. If you hold the ceremony outdoors, you may need a tent or a fall back plan due to inclement weather.
- Secure a podium with a microphone and sound system.
- Determine who the “master or mistress of ceremony” (emcee) will be – for example, the local union president or president of the State AFL-CIO or Central Labor Council
- Determine who the key note speaker will be and other guest speakers. Some of the most powerful speakers are workers who have been injured/made ill on the job, the families of workers who have died on the job, and co-workers who witnessed workplace tragedies. Some families may want to read the eulogy of their loved one or speak about the impacts of losing a loved one to call for greater worker protections.
- Send invitations to families of the deceased asking them to attend. You may also want to speak with them to see they’d be interested in speaking at the ceremony.
- Determine if there is a color guard available who can present the U.S. and State Flags. Check with your local Police/Fire/American Legion/Veterans of Foreign Wars who can assist. These folks could also perform a 21 gun salute if the ceremony location would permit firearms.
- Determine if there is a musicians’ union who can play music. Bagpipers playing “Amazing Grace” is popular as well as echoing “Taps” at the end of the ceremony. Church, school or community can also be used and may have other appropriate music/hymns for the ceremony.
- Obtain a list of names of workers who have died from occupational injury or illness from the USW’s Health, Safety & Environment Department.

If your local has ever had a fatality, you can also read the name(s) and age of those members who have died. Make sure you have the correct spelling, nicknames and age of the individual(s). The name(s) will need to be printed on ceremony’s program/agenda and to be read aloud as part of the ceremony.

- Submit the ceremony's draft agenda to those planning and/or involved (e.g. Local Union Officer's and Executive Board, State AFL-CIO/CLC, emcee and speakers) for final approval and printing.
- Distribute the final printed agenda to those planning/involved.
- Mailing of invitation letters/agenda to other unions in area, politicians, labor friendly organizations and so on to encourage attendance
- Determine if you want a silk floral or real memorial wreath for the ceremony (silk memorials can be reused). Real floral wreaths can be utilized for laying into a river or other body of water. You can also have a candle light service and then snuff out the candle for each of the lost workers when the name has been read aloud. Some ceremonies have pairs of work boots and shoes displayed representing the number of workers who died on the job. Some locals have the Carpenters Union apprentices make wooden crosses for the number of lost workers being honored and put on display for the service. Afterwards, families are encouraged to take the cross home that has their loved ones name on it. The deceased's name and age can be stenciled on the cross or have a nice sheet of paper stapled to it.

If crosses are made, they'll need to be displayed nicely. Some locals put them on a stage in front of the speakers and others insert them into the ground in straight rows and columns (like a military cemetery). Some newspapers have taken photos of family members with the cross of their loved one.

- Determine if there is a bell available that can be chimed when reading each of the lost workers' names and who will bring/ring the bell.
- Arrange for proclamations from the local government bodies City, County, and State and who should read them (SAMPLE ATTACHED).
- Submit a letter about WMD to the "Letters to the Editor" of the local newspaper(s).
- Send out a general media advisory/press release of the ceremony and speakers. Try to get local public radio or cable television coverage too. Local government TV channels have a scrolling of free advertisements.
- Designate a person to take digital photos of the ceremony. Please include your contact information and who took the photos (if different from the person who wrote the article).
- Designate a person who can submit a short article about the ceremony with some photos attached and email it to the USW's Health, Safety & Environment Department safety@usw.org
- Determine if you'd like to have a benediction read at the opening/closing of the ceremony and who should give them.