



NORTHWEST

# LABOR PRESS

Volume 109  
Number 8  
April 18, 2008  
Portland

## Labor will honor Oregon workers killed on the job

Workers Memorial Day, April 28, is a day to remember workers killed on the job.

This year, the Northwest Oregon Labor Council will conduct a memorial service immediately following its monthly delegates meeting Monday, April 28, at the IBEW Local 48 Hall, 15837 NE Airport Way, Portland.

The meeting starts at 7 p.m. and the memorial service will begin at 7:30 p.m.

At the service, the names of the 59 workers killed in Oregon in work-related accidents in 2007 will be read. As their names are read a bell will toll and a flag will be raised in their memory. [A list of workers killed and their occupations is posted on Pages 8 and 9 of this issue.]

Michael Wood, administrator of Oregon-OSHA, will be the keynote speaker, and proclamations declaring April 28 as "Workers Memorial Day" will be presented from the offices of the governor of Oregon, mayor of Portland, and chair of Multnomah County.

The 59 workers killed on the job in Oregon in 2007 are recorded as "work-related deaths" by the Department of Consumer and Business Services. That means they are compensable under state workers' compensation claims. Another 24 people died at work from heart attacks and other natural causes. Those deaths are not part of the official number of work-related deaths as reported by OR-OSHA.

Nationally, 5,703 workers were killed in 2006 (the latest year data is

available) and more than 4.1 million workers were injured due to job hazards. Another 50,000 died due to occupational diseases.

The first Workers Memorial Day was observed in 1989. April 28 was chosen because it is the anniversary of the 1970 Occupational Safety and Health Act and the day of a similar remembrance in Canada. Trade unionists around the globe now mark April 28 as an International Day of Mourning.

Decades of struggle by workers and their unions have resulted in significant improvement in working conditions.

GOOD JOBS. SAFE JOBS. FOR ALL.

WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY • APRIL 28 • AFL-CIO



"But the fight must continue," said Judy O'Connor, executive secretary-treasurer of the Northwest Oregon Labor Council. "We must demand strong enforcement of job-safety laws, defend the gains we have won, and push forward to address problems that remain."

Some of those problems include getting public-sector workers and flight attendants covered under OSHA

laws; bringing outdated workplace standards up to date; and helping to establish stiffer penalties for employers who disregard safety rules.

Everyone is invited to attend the Northwest Oregon Labor Council's memorial service. For more information, call 503-235-9444.

### ATU Local 757

## Bus drivers' union steers industry toward healthier workplace

By DON McINTOSH  
Associate Editor

Driving a bus might not be top of the list when most people think of hazardous occupations. Bus drivers aren't rushing into burning buildings or handling downed electric wires. But it turns out driving a city bus eight or 10 hours a day can be one of the most dangerous jobs, from the standpoint of chronic health conditions. Much of it comes down to an inability to take bathroom breaks, constant stress, and the day-in, day-out vibration of operating a heavy motor vehicle.

Fifteen years ago, Susan Stoner was just days into a new job as a labor attorney for Portland-based Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757 when she noticed something peculiar.

"At my first ATU meeting, within an hour I noticed that over half the people in the meeting were standing against the wall," Stoner said. At the time, she just thought it was strange. Later, she realized it was because their backs were killing them.

"When you're bouncing along in a vehicle all



Adjustable seats with shock absorbers and hydraulics help ease back pain of TriMet bus operator and ATU member Sandy Guengerich.

day, that's what can happen," Stoner said. "It trashes your spine. So many end up with bad backs, and people could barely stand or sit any more."

A combination of union complaints and involvement by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) helped the industry face up to the problem. Better seats were developed, and now, adjustable seats with shock absorbers and hydraulics are the norm, so that drivers can be properly positioned and the seat can absorb more of the road shock.

Seats weren't the only contributor to health problems.

"We process death benefits at the union," Stoner said, "so we get a copy of the death certificates. It's not just that they were too young. What people die of was kind of surprising."

There seemed to be a high incidence of cardiovascular problems, and of cancers, especially urinary and gastrointestinal cancers.

The union was lucky. The National Institutes of Health decided to produce a summary of studies of transportation industry health problems. From that, Local 757 generated a document for

members to give to their doctors.

"Doctors often don't understand what they're looking at is caused by the job," Stoner said.

The studies gave confirmation to what bus drivers knew already: Theirs is a stressful job. Not only do they operate a large vehicle safely and weave in and out of the farthest right lane in heavy traffic. They also must deal with hundreds of passengers a day, be courteous and helpful, announce stops, and aim to be on time but never early. At TriMet, bus drivers get in trouble if the bus is more than a minute early.

Stress contributes to hypertension, obesity, type II diabetes, gastric ulcers, and a variety of cardiovascular health conditions, all of which bus drivers suffer from in higher numbers than the general population. As for the bladder and urinary tract cancers, Local 757 leaders are convinced it has to do with inadequate bathroom breaks.

"When you hold it too long, eventually your bladder becomes so painful it spasms, and you urinate involuntarily," Stoner said. Considering the shame and indignity of that, it's not the kind

(Turn to Page 12)