



Who's on our side?

By Graham Trainor Oregon AFL-CIO President

OR-OSHA: Workers are counting on you

Nearly 50 years ago in 1971, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) was created in response to dangerous working conditions across the nation. Just two years after the federal law was passed creating federal OSHA, Oregon became one of the first two states to pass our own workplace safety and health law, creating OR-OSHA. According to the federal law, our state plan must be at least as effective as federal OSHA in protecting workers. That means that Oregon can take stronger, more responsive action in our efforts to protect workers if the federal government isn't doing enough to keep us safe.

Now, let's take a look at worker protections in the midst of a deadly global pandemic. Our nation is about to surpass 200,000 deaths as a result of the coronavirus. Essential workers continue to bear the brunt of this pandemic as they interact with the public or their patients, and federal OSHA has still issued just a handful of citations despite receiving

tens of thousands of workplace complaints. Not to mention that federal OSHA, under Secretary of Labor Eugene Scalia, has refused to implement an emergency temporary standard for COVID-19 even after the national AFL-CIO filed a lawsuit demanding it. This means that there is currently no enforceable nationwide standard for keeping workers safe on the job from a deadly virus. It's long past time for states to act, especially when nearly 200 major COVID-19 workplace outbreaks (five or more cases in a worksite with more than 30 employees) have already been recorded in Oregon.

Oregon workers were proud to see Governor Kate Brown and OR-OSHA initiate a rulemaking process for an emergency temporary standard, with plans for a permanent standard, to pick up the slack and protect workers when our federal government refused to do so. This, we believed, was the Oregon way, where we protect workers and value

their safety and health. Unfortunately, that's where the pride ends in the current OR-OSHA process to adopt a strong rule to protect all Oregon workers from infectious diseases.

Oregon workers expect, and deserve, a lot from our elected leaders and state agencies. We were very encouraged when the state of Virginia adopted a strong, comprehensive emergency temporary standard in July to protect workers from COVID-19 and keep workplaces safe, believing that OR-OSHA would then improve on their already-strong standard. Hundreds of workers shared their stories of what they are facing on the job during a global pandemic, submitted public comments, and participated in listening sessions held by the agency in order to highlight the need for a strong, comprehensive rule.

Instead, the draft rule published by the agency is wholly inadequate and requires significant strengthening in order to meet the needs of Oregon workers and

the exposure risk they face today.

The crises facing working people in Oregon were immense before the recent and historic wildfire events. Now even more of us are hurting. One essential way that our state government can help us in the midst of so much darkness is by significantly strengthening the emergency temporary standard for COVID-19. The federal government has failed us and not kept us safe at work in the midst of a deadly pandemic. It's now truly up to OR-OSHA. We need, and our nation needs real leadership and strong protections now more than ever. Workers are counting on OR-OSHA to get this right, and not abdicate their responsibility to keep us safe, like federal OSHA has done now for nearly seven months.

Join us in calling on Gov. Brown and OR-OSHA to do right by those who've been called heroes throughout this crisis by going orafclcio.org/osha today. We need your voice in this fight. And to OR-OSHA: workers in Oregon and across the country are counting on you.

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