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Blast victim's sister to appear on '60 Minutes

Rebecca S. Green | The Journal Gazette

Nearly five years ago, Tammy Miser lost her brother in a dust explosion at a Huntington wheel manufacturer.

Since that time, the Lexington, Ky.-resident has tirelessly taken up the cause of workplace fatalities, speaking for family members left behind.

At 7 tonight on WANE-TV, Channel 15, Miser will be part of a segment on the CBS newsmagazine "60 Minutes" devoted to the dangers of dust. The segment, by reporter Scott Pelley, focuses on a February explosion at a sugar refinery in Savannah, Ga., that killed 13 people.

Miser, who founded the United Support and Memorial for Workplace Fatalities, was interviewed for the segment, which focuses heavily on Carolyn Merritt, the former head of the U.S. Chemical Safety Board.

Merritt chaired the Chemical Safety Board in October 2003 when metal dust inside a wheel manufacturing plant ignited a fireball, killing Shawn Boone, 33, a maintenance worker at the plant. Seven others were injured in the blast at what was then the Hayes-Lemmerz International factory in Huntington.

In November 2006, Merritt's Chemical Safety Board was asking the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration to develop a standard to address combustible dust explosions.

In March, along with Chemical Safety Board officials, Miser addressed members of Congress about the continued lack of combustible dust regulations, speaking to members of the Education and Labor Committee.

"We can't get OSHA to do anything, so we have to find another avenue," she said.

Now she's speaking before the cameras on national television.

"I didn't want Shawn to die in vain," Miser said in a telephone interview from her home in Kentucky. "We've had too many incidents like this."

About 6,000 people a year lose their lives while on the job, Miser said.

It is a total greater than those killed in the Iraq war, but they are lives often lost well outside the public eye, she said.

Miser's work with her group, the United Support and Memorial for Workplace Fatalities, is growing, she said. The all-volunteer organization finally obtained non-profit status, and it is starting to apply for some grants to help with funding.

Much of the money the group is trying to raise would be used to help get family members of those killed to Washington, D.C., when they are asked to testify about workplace deaths, she said.

"(Congress) asks you to come, and you're on your own," she said. "It's really important to us that people are getting to these things."

She said she is sometimes overwhelmed by the position she finds herself in as an advocate since her brother's death.

"Sometimes I wonder if I'm the best person," she said.

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