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Workplace Health and Safety Dirty Dozen Report

The National Council on Occupational Safety and Health [National COSH] released a report April 25 listing 12 companies with poor health and safety records.

Apr. 26, 2006 Katherine Torres

The report details examples of the tragic consequences of workplace deaths, injuries and illnesses for both workers and their families. It calls for stronger enforcement actions, including criminal prosecution, to encourage stricter compliance with health and safety standards. The release of the report coincided with the annual Workers Memorial Day on April 28, which marked the beginning of OSHA and remembers those workers killed, hurt or made ill on the job.

"This list a disgrace to all working Americans who risk their lives every day to make a living for their families" said Emanuel Blackwell National COSH Chairperson. This is the first list of its kind citing poor records in health and safety protections that result in death, serious injury and illnesses.

The report cites British Petroleum, Cintas Corp., DuPont Corp., Hayes Lemmerz International, Honda Motor Co. of America, International Coal Group (Sago Mine), McWane, Safety Bingo Inc., Sunesis, UNICCO, Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and W. R. Grace.

One of the companies cited, UNICCO which was cited by OSHA for repeated violations after an eighth job-related employee fatality since 1999 received lots of criticism from various unions for continued and reckless violations, stemming from exposing workers to dangerous chemicals to even sexual harassment against female employees.

"It is past time for UNICCO to clean up its act," said Stephen Lerner, Director of the Property Services Division of SEIU (Service Employees International Union), the nation's largest union of janitors, maintenance, and other property services workers. "UNICCO has demonstrated it cannot be trusted by clients or workers to obey the law or take even the most basic health and safety precautions. UNICCO's health and safety record borders on criminal."

A call made to UNICCO's public relations office was not returned.

As a means of preventing future tragedies, the report announced a new National COSH campaign, Stop Corporate Killers, which calls for an overhaul of the regulatory system and for stronger enforcement actions to encourage stricter compliance with health and safety standards.

Using OSHA citation data, case studies and media reports the National COSH selected which companies represented the best case studies of companies with poor health and safety records, said Peter Dooley, vice chair of National COSH, to OccupationalHazards.com.

We would like to make the issue of worker health and safety more visible to the public, he said. We want to inform them of the current regulatory system as well as increase the amount of pressure to have good health and safety programs.

"We need to act now to save others from the pain and suffering these preventable tragedies bring," said Tammy Miser of United Support and Memorial for Workplace Fatalities [USMWF] and sister of Shawn Boone, who died as a result of a workplace incident at Hays Lemmerz.

Donald Coit Smith, whose son was killed last year in a meatpacking fatality, states "Violations of the law, especially where death is concerned, must carry stiff penalties to include long jail terms.... They are, in effect, getting away with murder."

The full report is available at www.Philaposh.org or in English and Spanish.