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[Editorial: Workplace dangers lurk in every job](#)

The Herald Bulletin

ANDERSON, Ind. — Americans were recently reminded of the danger of working in mines when 29 men died in an explosion at the Upper Branch Mine in West Virginia.

Every year, about 5,000 American workers die from fatal injuries.

In Madison County, we were reminded of the unexpected danger of serving as a city street crew worker when Dale Jones was struck by a car last December while clearing debris from Scatterfield Road near Indiana 32. We were reminded more vividly of these realities on April 28 when Jones' widow, Tobi, helped organize a tribute to those workers who don't return home.

Fifty people gathered at the Anderson Town Center for a memorial picnic. The picnic included the release of 80 balloons to represent 80 workers who die each week from work-related injuries. The event came on April 28, also known as Workers Memorial Day, a time to honor men and women who suffered job-related injuries, illnesses and death.

While tears of mourning are appropriate at such observances, Workers Memorial Day is also a time to recommit ourselves to preventing, and eliminating, dangerous conditions in the workplace. It is more than slowing down a car and moving over to avoid construction crews. It is more than a driver putting down a cell phone when a flashing sign indicates work ahead. It is even more than praying for all workers. It involves simple action: anticipating safety needs.

In 2008, an estimated 3.7 million workers in private industry and 940,000 in state and local government had a nonfatal occupational injury or illness; 40 percent to 50 percent of those workers were transferred, placed on work restrictions, or took time away from work. An estimated 3.4 million workers were treated in emergency departments for occupational injuries and illnesses in 2007, and approximately 94,000 were hospitalized, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In 2008, 5,071 fatal work injuries were recorded in the U.S., thankfully down from 5,657 in 2007. Fatal work injuries in private construction declined 20 percent. Transportation incidents, which account for two-fifths of all workplace deaths, fell 13 percent from the 2,351 cases in 2007. There is positive news in recent data but there is always more to do.

Employers must actively remind their employees of any dangers whether it's a note that a sidewalk is icy to a reminder that no electrical outlet should be overloaded with extension cords. Work time should never be lost due to preventable injuries. Workers need to watch out for one another, vocally and visually. Preventing workplace injuries has to become second nature to all employees. And families, too, can get involved by quizzing their working relatives about conditions at their jobs.

One of the best ways to honor Dale Jones and the thousands of others who don't return home

from work is to think of them every time we get into a car, pull over as sirens pass in vehicles carrying rescue workers or as we simply look around the office at our fellow workers.