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NEW REPORT REVEALS THE DANGERS OF CONSTRUCTION WORK IN ILLINOIS

Repeal of worker protections has had deadly consequences for Illinois workers.

Chicago, IL - Consumer rights group the Center for Justice & Democracy-Illinois (CJ&D - IL) released a report today exposing the hazardous and deadly nature of the construction industry in Illinois since the elimination of a safety law more than 10 years ago. "The construction deaths and injuries we're seeing in Illinois are not inherent to the industry; they're happening because the construction industry is not being held accountable for protecting workers," said Jason Held, Staff Director of CJ&D-IL.

According to the report, construction worker safety was weakened in 1995 when the Illinois legislature repealed the Structural Work Act, which had been in effect for 88 years. The repeal of this law removed critical safety standards, stripped injured workers of legal protections, and reduced the incentive for owners, operators and contractors to maintain a safe worksite.

"The safety of Illinois citizens is jeopardized when certain negligent contractors in the construction industry are not held accountable for a safe workplace," said Michael Carrigan, President of the Illinois AFL-CIO. "The families of injured and killed workers have little recourse to help cope with their devastating loss. As the population of day laborers grows and OSHA fails to enforce its own rules to safeguard the public, citizens need more legal and physical protections."

The new report finds that Illinoisans in and around construction sites are not safe, and not enough is being done to make them safe. While construction work is inherently dangerous, many Illinoisans' deaths and injuries could be prevented. The report investigates how the lack of legislative safeguards, like the Structural Work Act, compounds the problems surrounding construction work. Due to the prevalence of day laborers in today's construction market, employers are more able to ignore chronic safety concerns. Minimal OSHA inspections and fines fail to stop egregious violations, due to inadequate staff and resources. "OSHA's record of inspecting worksites is abysmal", said Peg Seminario Safety and Health Director for the AFL-CIO. "At its current inspection levels, it would take OSHA 121 years to inspect every Illinois worksite."

The current situation is not necessary. “Illinois was one of the safest states in the nation for construction work. Workers had clearly-defined safety protections and could seek redress for violations that led to injury or death. Contractors who endangered workers and citizens could be held accountable,” said Held. “Now there are serious violations that go unchecked. Construction deaths and injuries are viewed as anomalies instead of a widespread and preventable epidemic.”

Find the full report on CJ&D’s website at <http://centerjd.org/Illinois.htm>.

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