



UNITED STEELWORKERS
CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION



RESOLUTIONS

Resolution No. 15

Health, Safety & Environment

WHEREAS, serious health and safety hazards exist in all workplaces represented by our union from metals, mining, rubber, energy, paper, chemicals, manufacturing, forest products, healthcare, education and services, threatening the health and lives of USW members; and

WHEREAS, there have been 141 occupational fatalities in USW-represented facilities reported to the Health, Safety & Environment Department from March 14, 2017 through March 18, 2022. Hundreds more current and retired Steelworkers died from occupational diseases caused by hazardous exposures such as to toxic substances or COVID-19. Thousands more have been injured. Each year roughly 5,000 workers are killed on the job in the United States, and more than 900 are killed in Canada. Annually, an estimated 120,000 more in the US and Canada die from occupational diseases and thousands of workers are routinely cheated out of adequate workers' compensation by regressive laws, policies and outright corporate fraud; and

WHEREAS, non-union workers are even more likely to be injured or killed on the job than those who have won the protection of a union contract. These workers suffer exploitation and have limited protection and resources to improve working conditions; and

WHEREAS, the increased occurrence and severity of climate change has increased workers' exposure to heat, extreme weather events, wildfires and natural disasters that have devastated many of our members' and other workers' communities, highlighting the need for more comprehensive strategies to address climate change; and

WHEREAS, employers continue to adopt insulting "blame the worker" safety approaches that fail to address the cause of health and safety problems – workplace hazards, and instead blame workers themselves for workplace accidents and disease; and

WHEREAS, health and safety regulations are lacking to properly address many hazards such as COVID-19, insufficient staffing, excessive overtime, absent or inadequate training, robotics and other new technologies; and

WHEREAS, many employers have adopted policies and practices which punish workers who report workplace injuries, illnesses and near misses. As a result, accidents are not reported or

investigated, and hazards remain unchecked. Injury statistics remain unreliable and costs associated with work injuries and illnesses are shifted from the employer and workers compensation to workers and their share of ever-increasing health insurance costs; and

WHEREAS, the USW's Health, Safety & Environment Department and the Emergency Response Team provides onsite and remote assistance with fatal and life-altering accidents to understand the systems that failed, and to bring critical services, including advocacy, legal representation, support and counseling, to victims, their families and local unions; and

WHEREAS, progressive health and safety laws in both of our countries continue to be attacked by greedy corporations and their right-wing allies in national, state, and provincial legislatures; and

WHEREAS, in the best of times, OSHA, MSHA and Canadian safety and health legislation and regulations save lives, but the process for setting new progressive standards is long and cumbersome, and the standards for many serious hazards are badly out-of-date. For some leading causes of deaths and injuries like infectious diseases, workplace violence, combustible dusts, poor ergonomics, and newly recognized hazards like engineered nanoparticles and workplace mental health, most jurisdictions have no standards at all; and

WHEREAS, it has now been 30 years since the Westray Mine disaster and over 18 years since the Steelworkers won amendments to the Criminal Code of Canada to hold corporations criminally responsible and accountable. The USW's "Stop the Killing - Enforce the Law" campaign has finally resulted in a few criminal prosecutions for workplace fatalities caused by employer negligence. However, despite our incredible efforts, far too many police forces, crown attorneys and prosecutors ignore the Westray amendments. They are failing to investigate workplace fatalities through a criminal lens which could warrant charges and convictions under the Criminal Code of Canada. Canadian Federal and Provincial Governments are still not demonstrating sufficient political will to enforce the Westray amendments; and

WHEREAS, government standards will never be enough to adequately cover every hazardous condition in our workplaces. Every USW workplace needs strong health, safety & environmental contract language, comprehensive health and safety systems, union-only and union-management health, safety & environment committees; and

WHEREAS, the Canadian Labour Congress and the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations have established April 28th as a National Day of Mourning and Workers Memorial Day to remember those who have been injured and died on the job, and to renew our commitment to fight for the living. April 28th also serves as a day to educate the general public, as highlighted by programs like the USW's innovative Canadian New Worker Awareness Program and education campaign; and

WHEREAS, our union has been a leader in representing workers on matters pertaining to workplace health and safety. This is demonstrated by the union's commitment to negotiate strong health and safety provisions in collective bargaining agreements in order to obtain for our members the on-the-job protections they deserve. Better working conditions cannot be won without courageous and committed local union health and safety activists with a union approach to health and safety; and

WHEREAS, the key to achieving strong health and safety protections, whether through collective bargaining or through the legislature, is a strong union; and health and safety activism is important to building a strong union and labor movement; and

WHEREAS, many of our workplaces, our safety devices and workplace uniforms are designed to accommodate the bodies that are dominant in the workplace, putting workers who do not fit that body design at risk; and

WHEREAS, as women delegates stated at the 2019 Canadian National Policy Conference, women face different health and safety risks because of biological and social attitudes and most workplaces, machines, personal protective equipment and safety programs have been designed to suit male workers, women have often been left out.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that:

- (1) This convention pledges to redouble our efforts to prevent workplace fatalities, catastrophic accidents, injuries, and occupational illnesses.
- (2) We will reinvigorate our efforts to organize the unorganized so that the health and safety protections of our union may be brought to those who most desperately need them.
- (3) We call upon all USW members to campaign vigorously and vote for political candidates who will support improving workplace health and safety & the environment, and who will insist that government agencies in the United States and Canada serve the best interests of workers.
- (4) We pledge unrelenting opposition to corporate and legislative efforts to weaken occupational health, safety & environmental laws, regulations, and enforcement in the United States and Canada. We will work for the passage of progressive legislation to better protect worker rights and worker safety. We will also oppose so-called "tort reform," which seeks to take away our members' right to win compensation for injuries caused by dangerous and defective products.
- (5) We will continue to work for stronger health, safety & environmental regulations and just, fair workers' compensation.
- (6) We will continue our "Stop the Killing – Enforce the Law Campaign" in Canada until the Westray amendments to the Criminal Code are properly enforced and those corporate managers and executives whose negligence is responsible for workplace fatalities and critical injuries are sent to prison.
- (7) We will continue and expand our efforts to educate our members and health and safety activists in all countries. We will work to ensure that every member knows their rights under the contract and the law – especially the right to refuse unsafe work. We will include a focus of this effort on young workers and workers new to the union. We will also find additional avenues to educate students, new workers, and the public about safety and health issues as they prepare to enter the workforce; and ensure language justice so all workers have access to information and education.

- (8) We will continue our efforts to improve and enforce the health and safety clauses of our collective bargaining agreements, including the right to refuse unsafe work, immediate arbitration of health and safety disputes, union access to all relevant information, and an increased role for local union health, safety & environment committees and representatives.
- (9) We will maintain our support for the efforts of our local union health, safety & environment activists with a union approach to their daily representation of our members and their efforts to efficiently document, control and eliminate workplace hazards and press for comprehensive health and safety systems. We will expand our efforts to educate local union health and safety activists and committee members so that they are able to respond effectively to current health and safety issues such as confronting “blame the worker” safety programs, infectious diseases, and the impact of work restructuring on health and safety.
- (10) We will work to promote union goals, values and principles in all our occupational health and safety efforts. We will oppose so-called “safety” programs that assume that worker misbehavior is the primary cause of workplace accidents. This includes our commitment to oppose “safety incentive” programs that assume workers are too stupid to care about their own safety and must be bribed with trinkets. We will insist on safety programs that enlist the skill, knowledge, and commitment of the workforce in finding and correcting hazards. We will continue to assert our strong belief that our members are not the problem – they are the solution.
- (11) We will actively promote increased research on occupational disease, and will work to establish government databases of worker exposure records, with strong privacy protections. We will work to expand a network of worker-friendly occupational health clinics in the United States and Canada.
- (12) We will fight to strengthen workers’ compensation and negligence laws. All jurisdictions should increase workers’ compensation benefits for victims and survivors. Loopholes favoring the employer must be closed so that all work-related injuries and occupational diseases are fully compensated regardless of the latency of the injury or disease.
- (13) We will continue to advocate for worldwide recognition of April 28th as a day to remember our lost sisters and brothers, and to re-dedicate ourselves to fight for the living.
- (14) We will continue to work with other unions in our two countries and around the world, international labor federations, and other progressive organizations in the fight to improve health, safety & environment for all workers.
- (15) That the Union continues to advocate for more inclusive workplace design by increasing awareness of women's health and safety issues.
- (16) That all USW Locals ensure that our workplaces are providing Health and Safety equipment, PPE and facilities that are designed to recognize that we are more than one gender in our workplaces.

- (17) That our workplace committees continue to ensure that the employer is not providing a one size fits all approach to workplace safety.
- (18) That the Union pledges to raise women's voices on safety in the workplace through the continued support of the Raising the Bar on Women's Health and Safety international and Canadian education campaigns.