

Workplace safety still an issue

*By Michael Wood*

Not all families get to experience the safe return of their loved one from work. Thousands of workers in the United States die each year from work-related incidents.

That's why on [Worker's Memorial Day](#), April 28, I want to encourage employers and workers throughout Oregon to remember those whose lives were cut short. It's a time to think about what government, employers and workers have done to make Oregon workplaces safer over the past two decades — and a time to remember that the fight is not over. During this year's event, we will read the names of 64 workers who lost their lives on the job.

Over the years, certain worker fatalities that crossed my desk have particularly touched me.

I remember the young mother, getting her life put back together after beating a drug habit, killed when she got caught in a cardboard recycling machine. The job was part of her rehabilitation program.

I remember the high school boy overcome and killed, along with his best friend, in a hay silo when working on his father's farm.

I remember another young worker who died in a tractor rollover that could have prevented by the rollover protection device sitting in the barn, where it had been since being removed nine years before.

I remember the 43-year-old father of three, killed in an automobile accident, whose death jolted me because we were about the same age — and shared the same name.

And I remember the worker killed in the morning without seeing the note from his wife in his lunchbox — in which she congratulated him on his last day before retirement.

As the head of Oregon OSHA, I know plenty of statistics. Statistics can help us understand whether we make a difference. But it is the stories of lives ended before their time that stick with me. Those stories remind me that each of the "numbers" we talk about has a name, has a story, has people who care about him or her. And these stories prompt me to ask, "When is the right time to die on the job?"

The answer, of course, is never. That is why I come to work each day; it provides me the opportunity to work with those in government, in business and in labor who are writing a different story for the lives we touch. Each of those stories will still have an ending, of course. But the ending need not be a life cut short in the workplace.

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*Michael Wood is a certified safety professional and the administrator of Oregon OSHA, the Occupational Safety and Health Division of the Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services.*