

Railroad Workers to Conduct National Rail Workers Memorial Day

Fed up with the spike in railroad worker on-the-job fatalities, railroad workers nationwide will take action on Friday, June 18th to remember the fallen dead and to fight for the living. Railroaders across the country will wear black to work as a show of solidarity on the Friday of Fathers Day weekend.

June 13, 2010 (FPRC) -- Despite far fewer trains moving with fewer employees, the number of rail worker on-the-job fatalities has dramatically increased since the onset of the recession. High profile fatalities – such as passenger train accident victims or soldiers killed in war – make headline news, while on-the-job deaths of working people usually go unnoticed. Railroad Workers United (RWU), a rank-and-file association of railroad workers from all rail unions and crafts, hopes to change this culture.

On Friday, June 18th, railroad workers across the United States will don black shirts in a display of mourning and remembrance of their fellow workers killed on the nation's railroads in the last 12 months. The day of action, dubbed "Black Shirt Friday" is designed to heighten awareness – among railroad workers and the general public -- of the rising number of work related deaths that have occurred in recent years.

Railroad Workers United first called for such an action last year at this time, in response to the spike in rail worker fatalities, most notably the death of Jared Boelhke, killed on Mothers Day 2009.

According to his widow, Heather, "My husband's death did not have to happen. Had the rail carrier had any commitment to safety, Jared would be alive and still be a husband and a father and a railroader." Boelhke was killed while working alone on a remote control locomotive in Selkirk, NY, performing work of what should have required more labor than just his.

Railroad work continues to be a very dangerous occupation. While the last century or more has seen great advances in railroad safety – largely through the efforts of rail workers and their unions -- far more remains to be done to eliminate such tragic and unnecessary deaths.

Ultimately, RWU hopes to institutionalize Black Shirt Friday as "Railroad Workers Memorial Day", and seeks the endorsement for such a concept from railroad workers and their unions. According to RWU Secretary Jen Wallis, "We need a day when we can step back from the job, a day when we can recognize our commonality as rail workers. A national Railroad Workers Memorial Day would serve to unite us in our efforts to build a safer workplace."

While the rail carriers safety programs tend to focus on worker behavior, railroad workers believe that elimination of hazards must be at the root of any successful safety program. According to RWU Co-Chair Jon Flanders, "If dangerous working conditions and hazards are not eliminated, if workers are fatigued as a result of overwork, if schedules are unpredictable and work hours long, injuries and accidents are bound to occur."

Railroad Workers United urges all railroaders to wear black clothing – specifically black T-shirts – to work on Friday, June 18th, the Friday before Father's Day. According to RWU Co-Chair Ed Michael, "Black Shirt Friday is a day for railroad workers to come together in solidarity around the question of

on-the-job fatalities. It is a day for us to mourn for the dead and fight like hell for the living!”

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Keywords

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