

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



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For Immediate Release

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Statement by AFL-CIO President Trumka on GAO Report on the Accuracy of Workplace Injury and Illness Data November 16, 2009

The GAO report released today confirms that employer policies and practices that discourage the reporting of workplace injuries and illnesses are widespread and undermining the safety and health of America's workers.

The results of a GAO survey of more than 1,000 occupational health practitioners are alarming – more than two thirds reported that workers were afraid of discipline or termination for reporting injuries; 53% reported that they were pressured by company officials to downplay injuries; and more than one-third were asked by company officials to withhold necessary medical treatment to injured workers so the injury wouldn't be recorded on the OSHA log.

These results are consistent with the results of a recent local union survey conducted by the AFL-CIO and national unions. More than half of local union leaders surveyed reported that there were safety incentive programs, injury discipline programs, absenteeism policies with demerits for injuries and/or post-injury drug testing policies in their workplaces and that these policies discouraged the reporting of workplace injuries by workers.

Employer policies that discourage the reporting of injuries not only undermine the completeness and accuracy of workplace injury data and the Bureau of Labor Statistics surveys, more importantly they prevent injured workers from receiving needed medical care and prevent hazardous conditions that injure workers from being identified and corrected.

These destructive and discriminatory practices must be stopped. We applaud the National Emphasis Program on injury reporting and recording launched by the Obama Administration, the first time in two decades that OSHA has focused on employer injury recordkeeping practices. OSHA must use this initiative not only to evaluate the accuracy of employers' injury and illness logs but to take strong enforcement action against employers who are thwarting the reporting and recording of injuries and illnesses.

(For a copy of the preliminary results of the AFL-CIO/union survey on Extent and Impact of Employer Programs and Practices on Workers Reporting Their Injuries contact the AFL-CIO Safety and Health Office at 202-637-5366.)

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