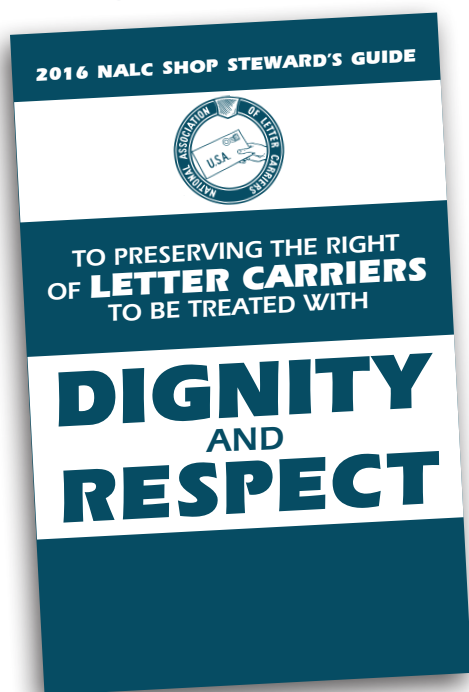


# Workers Memorial Day a reminder to fight for workers' rights and safety



**O**n April 28, Workers Memorial Day will be observed internationally to honor those who have been killed or injured on the job. It is a time to remember and mourn, of course, but it is also a time to pause, reflect and renew the call for safety and respect in the workplace.

One way to ensure safe letter carrier jobs is to uphold our right to be treated with dignity and respect. NALC has worked to highlight management's obligation as well as both parties' intent to ensure a working environment free from physical dangers, threats, intimidation, harassment and violence.

The *NALC Shop Steward's Guide to Preserving the Right of Letter Carriers to be Treated with Dignity and Respect* brings together tools, documents and guidance on these matters. The booklet is available at [nalc.org](http://nalc.org) through the "Members Only" portal.

The guide addresses how to document important events on the workroom floor that may later be used to support grievances. It also walks shop stewards through the five key elements in handling grievances successfully. The booklet contains a copy of the Joint Statement on Violence in the Workplace (M-01242) with guidance on the pertinent sections to cite for various violations. It is a valuable resource for assisting branch representatives in any number of workplace situations.

"Unfortunately, there are too many instances of mistreatment of letter carriers," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "It was the parties' intent that all postal employees would be able to work in a safe environment where they would receive the respect they deserved. We created this booklet to give NALC representatives guidance on using the tools available to address any mistreatment." **PR**

## Carrier leads Workers Memorial Day event

**U**kiah, CA Branch 1563 member Terry Poplawski remembers seeing information about Workers Memorial Day in *The Postal Record* many years ago. "It didn't mean anything to me," he said. That changed when the husband of a co-worker was killed at a construction site. Suddenly, the message came into focus. "Then it made sense," he said.

"It's a pretty rural reality here," Poplawski said of Mendocino County, where he lives. "Physically, [it] is bigger than many small states." That rural reality means that it's home to some dangerous job sectors—agriculture, logging and trucking, to name a few.

Around the time of the construction worker's death, Poplawski and a fel-

low delegate to the North Bay Central Labor Council were trying to think of a way to help union workers connect across the capacious county. The idea of an observance of Workers Memorial Day came up, but first, Poplawski needed to clear it with his colleague, Shari McCassey, a distribution clerk. "I asked her how she'd feel about this, because obviously she was in pain," he remembered. She said she was "too numb to even participate," but also said that her husband had been a staunch union man, so it seemed right.

The first observance was held in 1999 in Ukiah, and has been held there every year since. "It's a Mendocino County thing, in that we honor those killed or injured in Mendocino County

no matter where they're from," as well as honoring residents who are killed outside of the county, said Poplawski, now retired after carrying mail for about three decades.

The event has gone through several iterations over the years. For one, it has moved from its original location in a downtown plaza to an indoor room. "It turned out that April 28 is a volatile time here, weather-wise," he said, "so there were some years it would be way too hot, or a nice spring day, or cold and rainy."

Around the time the event moved indoors, McCassey, his grieving colleague, was ready to get involved. Through hard-won wisdom, she came up with an important new goal. "When someone's killed on the job, their paycheck stops.



Chris Pugh — Ukiah Daily Journal

They have insurance down the line, but that takes a while to happen; people still have to eat,” Poplawski remembers her pointing out. She threw herself into this new goal and, after years of dedicated fundraising, the group is able to offer survivor grants. The grants began at \$500 and are now at \$750. They’re hoping to bump that up to \$1,000.

The North Bay Central Labor Council helps support the event financially, a union printer provides flyers and programs free of charge, and the Community Foundation of Mendocino County—which functions as the nonprofit umbrella for the survivors’ fund—donates a space in its building for the service. A local newspaper reporter has covered the event for years.

The roughly one-hour observance is normally on the small side—“usually 20 to 30 at the most,” he said—and, understandably, somber in tone. People are encouraged to speak, if they want to.

Poplawski, who was president of his branch for 25 years, makes sure to include a variety of union items on display to emphasize that unions led the fight for safer conditions. He also compiles a scrapbook with news clippings about the workers being honored, and says he’s received thank-you letters from people who were “happy to know



Top: Terry Poplawski speaks at the Workers Memorial Day observance in Mendocino County, CA.

Above: The Workers Memorial Day poster from the AFL-CIO

that someone cared, that someone was thinking of them.”

The retiree is pretty much chief cook and bottle washer for the tribute. He has asked for volunteers but the interest has not been sufficient to allow him to abandon his role. And while he says it’s “not a strain in any sense,” he would like to see it continue if he can no longer do it. “What I really need to do is start building a group of some younger people to take it on so there’s some perpetuity,” he said. **PR**