Washington Commemorates Worker Memorial Day

Local News

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People are gathering around the state through this weekend to honor those who have died on the job.

Workers' Memorial Day is a national day of remembrance, held on or near the April 28 date on which Congress passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) in 1970.

Several ceremonies will honor 69 people who died in Washington state in 2011 as a result of job-related illnesses or injuries. They include a corrections officer, a firefighter, a salesperson and a construction worker as well as military personnel, and will be remembered for their service to their communities.

James Robinson, president of the Washington Federation of State Employees Local 793 at Lakewood's Western State Hospital, says people come away from these ceremonies with a new resolve to be safer at work.It gives us all an opportunity to pause and reflect about our jobs and the environments that we work in, and how we can make 'em better. And that's really the focal point of Worker Memorial Day.

Nationally, the Bureau of Labor Statistics says more than 1 million people are injured on the job every year, and more than 4,500 lose their lives.

Robinson says workplace safety has been a particular challenge recently in light of state budget cuts which have affected his department and most others.

"Many times, we work shorthanded - and quite often, they have to do the best they can and we don't have, sometimes, adequate staffing to care for those who need the care. In fact, we have over 90 vacant positions here at the hospital."

The Lakewood ceremony is to start at 11:30 a.m. Friday at the hospital, 9601 Steilacoom Blvd. SW. A Workers' Memorial Day ceremony was held in Everett on Wednesday. In addition to the Lakewood event, others are coming up today in Tumwater, Friday in Bellingham and Seattle, and Saturday in Spokane. A calendar with details on the Washington ceremonies is online at thestand.org.