



THEN AND NOW: WORKER SAFETY UNDER TRUMP AND BIDEN

Every worker in the United States should be able to go home at the end of the workday in the same or better health than they started. Unfortunately, we know that's not always the case. Workers Memorial Day, April 28th, honors the people who didn't come home and serves as an opportunity to renew our pledge to lower the number of preventable deaths that take away parents, partners, children, and other loved ones.

A large part of the job of ensuring worker safety falls to the federal government. We can see in the last seven years the impact—positive or deadly—of an administration's prioritization of working people

and their safety. The track record clearly illustrates that the previous administration endangered workers at every turn, consistently signaling to companies that the government would not punish them for threatening the safety and health of their employees.

We can also see a dramatic shift from the current administration. President Biden has consistently prioritized worker safety and has implemented numerous policies to make workplaces safer and healthier and increase oversight of companies and employers.

In September 2020, The BlueGreen Alliance released [Misled: The](#)

[Impact of the Trump Administration's Agenda on Working Families and the Environment](#), an analysis of a range of policy actions made by the Trump administration.¹ Now, four years later, we can compare these policies alongside those of the Biden administration and clearly illustrate the impact of an administration's prioritization of worker health and safety.



Enabling OSHA to do its Job

Trump's OSHA Had Fewer Inspectors and Inspections

During the Trump administration, the number of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) inspectors and OSHA inspections dropped drastically. In January 2019, OSHA stated that they employed 875 compliance officers, down from 952 in 2016. The number of inspectors directly correlates with the number of workplaces that can be inspected and citations issued to employers. Inspectors on staff were cut to 870 in April 2019, this was [the lowest number of compliance officers in OSHA's history](#).² As a result, according to a [2019 report](#), there was only one OSHA inspector for every 79,000 workers in the United States, and at that staffing level OSHA only had enough inspectors to inspect workplaces once every 165 years.³

Biden Increased OSHA's Capacity

By the end of 2023, OSHA had 878 inspectors, [an 11% increase from](#) the Trump administration.⁴ The agency conducted 31,820 total inspections in FY 2022, a 30.8% increase from FY 2021.

Protecting Workers from COVID

Trump's OSHA Refused to Protect Workers and their Communities from COVID-19

Throughout the pandemic, workplaces became COVID-19 hot spots. Data shows that [early in the outbreak almost 50% of infections came from the workplace](#).⁵ One of the tools available to OSHA to protect workers during an event like a pandemic is the ability to issue an emergency temporary standard requiring employers to reduce workplace hazards. Instead of taking this step, Trump's OSHA released only [voluntary guidance](#) that was—by the agency's own admission—unenforceable.⁶

Additionally, Trump declined to use his authority under the Defense Production Act to ensure that frontline workers had access to the personal protective equipment they needed to stay safe and instead invoked it to [force workers back into unsafe meatpacking plants](#).⁷

Biden's OSHA Took Action on COVID

On June 21, 2021, OSHA issued a rule to protect healthcare workers and on November 4, 2021, OSHA announced an emergency temporary rule to protect all public sector workers from COVID-19.

Keeping Workers and Communities Safe from Chemical Hazards

Trump's EPA Made Dangerous Facilities More Dangerous

In November of 2019, the Trump U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) undid almost everything the Obama administration had done in the Chemical Disasters Rule to prevent deadly chemical accidents. The Trump administration removed from the regulation the worker-involved analyses of incidents, accidents and near-misses, a consideration of safer technologies, and the requirements to inform the surrounding communities about the [chemical hazards and the plans to protect workers](#) and fence-line communities when there is an accident.⁸

Biden's EPA Strengthened Chemical Safety Requirements

On March 1, 2024, the [EPA finalized its amendments to the Risk Management Program Rule](#) to reduce the threat of chemical accidents.⁹ The “Safer Communities by Chemical Accident Prevention Rule” requires stronger measures for prevention, preparedness, and public transparency including the use of analyses of safer technologies and process safety frameworks. It also includes stop work authority and increases worker participation and training in safety decisions.

Protecting Mine Workers

Trump's Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) Refused to Protect Miners from Silica

Research has shown that the incidence of black lung disease in miners has [doubled since the turn of the century](#).¹⁰ In the 21st century, a spike in cases of black lung among miners—and particularly among younger miners—is alarming and should have resulted in immediate action from the government agency tasked with protecting the health and safety of miners. That was not the case during the Trump administration, however. Trump's MSHA released a request for information on the topic in late 2019, but never released a proposal.

Under Biden, MSHA Issued Long-Awaited Standard

On April 16, 2024, [MSHA issued a strong standard](#) to protect miners from silica.¹¹

Company Reporting of Worker Injuries

Trump's OSHA Weakened Illness and Injury Reporting Requirements

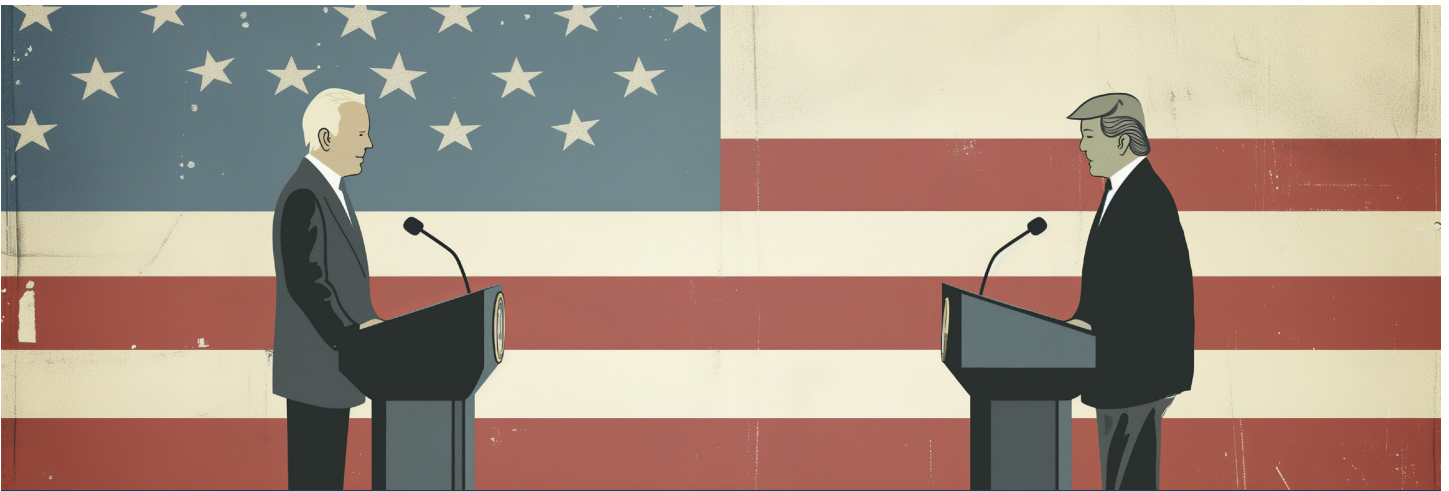
The Obama administration's OSHA [published a rule in December 2016](#) extending the period that OSHA had to issue official injury and illness recordkeeping violation citations.¹² Before this rule—which extended the citation period to five years—OSHA had only six months to cite employers if they found illegal errors in their illness and injury recordkeeping logs. By [signing a Congressional Review Act resolution overturning the rule](#), President Trump gave employers a “get out of jail free” card by setting the time OSHA has for citation back to six months from five years.¹³ The repeal was directly linked to [worker injury reporting issues at Tesla](#), where investigations found the company delayed reporting injuries until after the 6-month period for citations, allowing them to get off the hook for endangering workers.¹⁴

President Obama's 2016 Electronic Recordkeeping Rule also proposed that larger employers and many businesses in high-risk industries electronically submit to OSHA their full employee work-related illness and injury logs along with supplementary incident reports. The Trump administration [rolled back the rule](#)—abolishing the electronic reporting requirements and making it harder for federal and state agencies, unions, and the public health community to identify and solve occupational safety and health problems.¹⁵

Biden Restored Electronic Reporting for High-Risk Industries

As of January 1, 2024, companies with more than 100 employees in high-risk industries must electronically report on the injuries and illnesses that occurred in their workplace. [OSHA estimates](#) that this new rule will require about 50,000 workplaces to submit information on 750,000 injuries and illnesses every year.¹⁶





WORKER SAFETY UNDER TRUMP AND BIDEN

Biden

Policy

Trump

11% increase

OSHA inspectors

Lowest in history

Strong standard

Miners exposed to silica

No standard

Strengthened the rule

Hazardous chemical facilities

Weakened the rule

Strengthened the rule

Reporting injuries to OSHA

Weakened the rule

Launched rulemaking

Workplace heat standard

No action

Two emergency OSHA standards

COVID-19

No OSHA standard



Taking Worker Safety Further

The Biden administration actions noted above all make workers safer. But Biden didn't stop at just correcting the mistakes of the previous administration, he is actively working to address concerns around worker safety that the Trump administration never even considered. For example, OSHA has [launched the first ever effort to establish a national workplace heat standard](#)—an increasingly prevalent hazard that Trump's OSHA neglected to address.¹⁷ OSHA is also working on a new rule to protect emergency responders.

Additionally, President Biden's support for unions improves the chances of every worker in the United States to come home, safe and sound, every day. Unions make workers safer (see sidebar). In this way, President Biden's support for the National Labor Relations Board and the United Autoworker's Historic Stand Up Strike and the prioritization of collective bargaining agreements, project labor agreements, and worker-involved safety and health programs in historic federal infrastructure, manufacturing, and environmental laws support a safer, healthier future for workers in the United States.

Unions' Impact on Workplace Safety

Four recent studies demonstrate how the work environment is made safer and healthier by the presence of unionized workers:

[An analysis published in Health Affairs](#) in April of 2022 found that in 2020 and 2021 unionized nursing homes lost 10.8% fewer residents to COVID-19.¹⁸ Unionized nursing home workers also kept themselves safer, experiencing 6.8% lower COVID-19 infection rates than their non-unionized counterparts.

[A November 2021 report surveying the construction industry](#) by the Illinois Economic Policy Institute found that union worksites are 19% less likely to have an OSHA violation and had 34% fewer violations per OSHA inspection than non-union worksites.¹⁹ Overall, while unions represent 14% of the construction industry employees, their employers account for only 5% of the industry's OSHA violations.

A study entitled [Coal Mine Safety: Do Unions Make a Difference? published in Cornell University's Industrial and Labor Relations Review](#) looked at the relationship between unionization and underground bituminous coal mine safety from 1993 to 2010 and found that unionization is associated with a 14 to 32% drop in traumatic injuries and a 29 to 83% drop in fatalities.²⁰

A September 2022 [study on the impact of unionization on safety and health compared workplaces where unions had won or lost close elections](#) and found that workers in unionized manufacturing facilities have fewer injuries and illnesses that require days away from work, job restrictions, and job transfers.²¹

Endnotes

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