

Make work safe

May 8, 2008

The Structural Work Act held owners and contractors responsible and accountable for injuries and deaths on construction sites and resulted in Illinois being one of the safest states for construction workers. When that act was abolished in 1995, safety standards were eliminated and worthwhile incentives to force owners and contractors to provide safe job conditions were rendered useless.

The Chicago Tribune's assumption ("The lawyers-get-work act," Editorial, April 29) that Illinois' workers' compensation system has been a worthy substitute and that it provides injured tradesmen fair compensation is simply incorrect. Workers' compensation merely allows for immediate stop-gap monies, but no long-term solutions for injured workers. It was never intended to assess liability or allocate fault for workers' injuries or deaths.

Construction work is inherently dangerous. It accounts for more deaths in America than any other industry. O.S.H.A., the federal agency charged with work-site safety, is wholly ineffective due to budgetary cutbacks and reduction of inspectors. As a result, companies and contractors cut costs and use day laborers who are low wage, undocumented and often unskilled, leading to unsafe work-sites.

Illinois' Construction Safety Act, pending in the legislature, will make owners and contractors, who are in the best position to provide the proper equipment and safety measures, responsible for work-site safety. The Act will also require subcontractors to follow suit. If Illinois wants to protect its workers, this legislation must be passed.

Your argument that this proposed legislation is nothing more than a chance for trial lawyers to hit the jackpot is tired. And old. Your readers deserve better.

This legislation is not about lawyers.

It's about construction workers making it home safely and being able to sit down at the dinner table with their families.

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