

Theresa Utton-Jerman

Subject: FW: Increase VOSHA budget request
Attachments: Scan 1.jpeg; Scan.jpeg

From: Susan Elder
Subject: Increase VOSHA budget request

February 10, 2020

TO:
Vermont General Assembly
Montpelier, Vermont 05602

CC:
House Commerce and Economic Development Committee
House Appropriations Committee
Senate Economic Development and General Affairs Committee
Senate Appropriations Committee

RE: Support for Increased Funding for the Vermont Occupational Safety and Health Program (VOSHA)

Dear Representatives & Senators:

The family and friends of David Elder join me in urging your support of increased funding for the VOSHA budget in fiscal year 2021 and beyond. Federal funds for VOSHA have not increased in 12 years, resulting in Vermont's budget share being level-funded for those same years. In response to these budget constraints, the VOSHA program has had to reduce staff due to increasing administrative, COLA increases, and to generally "keep the lights on." It is our observation that the result has been a decrease in the on-the-ground compliance staff performing training to, and inspections on, Vermont employers.

Job injury rates have been steadily declining over the past decade, however, the number of job-related deaths in 2017 more than doubled. This unexplained blip has since stabilized, but this "blip" equates to 5-10 Vermonters dying while performing their jobs that year. It is our belief that increased funding will allow the Department of Labor to bring on more compliance officers to perform life-saving training, inspections, and compliance checks on Vermont companies. This will likely prevent many of the injuries and deaths this year and for years to come.

David, a ninth generation Vermonter, was killed at P & H Truck Stop on September 10, 2017 as a driver at a gas pump ran over him while David was performing maintenance on an underground storage tank. David was using all necessary safety equipment provided to him by the company, however, VOSHA determined that P & H did not provide all the safety equipment and training As required under the VOSHA regulations VOSHA fined the company \$21,000 but reduced the fine to \$13,650 after P & H verbally agreed to fix the errors. There has been no on-site inspection of compliance to confirm whether the infractions have been made. Random site inspections to a fined business, especially after an injury or death, should be standard practice. At the present time, many businesses are allowed to verbally state that compliance errors have been rectified as in this case. In other words, we are taking the business' word that the worker currently performing David's job is safe.

Please make increased funding to VOSHA the highest priority for our State by continuing the investment in the safety of Vermont workers. Thank you for this consideration.

Sincerely,

Susan Elder, Chelsea

Kara Chamberlin Reed, Woodsville

Khristine Elder, Ryegate Corner

William Elder, Ryegate Corner

Gail Brown, Ryegate

Arthur Edersheim, Chelsea

Patricia Ringey, Cornwall