

2005 News Releases

Release: Immediate
January 12, 2005
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Berry Nationally Recognized for Commitment to Construction Safety

RALEIGH-A strong commitment to safety in the home building industry earned Labor Commissioner Cherie Berry national recognition by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB).

Berry was named 2004 State Official of the Year for her focus on education and outreach in construction after being nominated by the North Carolina Home Builders Association.

"Commissioner Berry's emphasis on cooperation and partnerships with the regulated community and her establishment of value-added service are in the highest tradition of public service," said Paul Wilms, NCHBA director of governmental affairs. "She has established NCDOL as an example for other state regulatory programs to emulate."

Berry made creating strong partnerships with the private sector one of her top priorities after being elected in 2000. She wants businesses and government to work together to create a safer North Carolina.

During Berry's tenure as labor commissioner, work fatalities have dropped from 234 in 2000 to 182 in 2003. Injury and illness rates among workers have remained at a record-low for two years. She also created the country's first mobile training unit, Labor One, which can travel to any work site in the state to provide free, customized training in English or Spanish.

"It's truly an honor to be recognized by the Home Builders Association," Berry said. "They are an outstanding group of people to work with and I value their commitment to worker safety."

Berry is scheduled to receive the award at the International Builders' Show-the largest construction industry show in the world-Jan. 13 in Orlando, Fla.

Release: Immediate
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NCDOL kicks off its annual safety awards program

The N.C. Department of Labor has kicked off another season of safety awards. Safety award applications were mailed to companies across the state last week.

N.C. Labor Commissioner Cherie Berry is urging businesses in the state to apply for a safety award.

"This is an excellent way for a company to show everyone in its community and everyone on its workforce that it values the safety and health of its employees," Berry said.

Companies will be selected for demonstrating outstanding on-the-job safety records from the previous year. Award recipients will be honored in their communities at a safety awards banquet hosted by the N.C. Department of Labor, which has workplace safety and health as one of its main objectives.

In 2004, the labor department presented 1,845 awards statewide for the previous year.

The awards require that businesses record no fatalities at the site during 2004. The gold award criteria are based on achieving a lost workday case rate, which includes cases of lost workdays and restricted workdays, that is at least 50 percent below the statewide rate. The silver award criteria include lost workday cases but do not include restricted work activity, and the applicant must attain an incidence rate for cases with days away from work that is at least 50 percent below the statewide rate for its industry.

Companies that experienced workplace fatalities in 2004 are not eligible for these awards.

For additional information, call LaFonda Mauldin at 1-800-NC-LABOR or (919) 807-2908 or e-mail her at lmauldin@mail.dol.state.nc.us.

Interested companies can get an application through the Internet at www.nclabor.com.

Release: Immediate
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Labor Aims to Curb Construction Fatalities in West

Salisbury-N.C. Department of Labor officials are sponsoring regional Construction Forums-in English and Spanish-with construction workers to stem fatalities and injuries in what is some of the most dangerous work in North Carolina.

"The construction season will soon peak, and construction is booming in Rowan and Cabarrus counties," Commissioner Cherie Berry said. "Our goal is to save more construction workers' lives this year, but if we only save one more, our efforts were not in vain."

Labor officials increased the number of Hispanic forums this year because of the number of Hispanics working in the industry. Fatalities among Hispanic workers dropped from 25 in 2002 to 21 in 2003.

The labor department has intensified its efforts to provide free consultative services and free training to employers and employees to help fight workplace fatalities.

The forums are part of Berry's major initiative to reduce the number of deaths occurring in the construction industry.

The state has seen great strides in workplace safety. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, North Carolina has the third-lowest injury rate in the country. Five years ago, North Carolina wasn't even in the top 10.

"We can see we're making progress. We just need to make sure we extend this awareness to every construction site in the state," Berry said.

The Salisbury meetings-scheduled for May 10 in English and May 11 in Spanish-will begin at 8 a.m. at the Rowan-Cabarrus Community College and are free of charge.

For additional information or to register by phone, call (919) 807-2950 or visit the N.C. Department of Labor's Web site at www.nclabor.com.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 25, 2005

Contact: Communications Office

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Work Fatalities in State Continue at Low Levels

RALEIGH-Figures released Thursday by the N.C. Department of Labor show that work fatalities in North Carolina totaled 183 in 2004, the fourth-lowest total seen in the state since labor officials started keeping detailed records.

Transportation-related incidents such as fatal highway accidents once again represented the major bloc of fatalities with 78 deaths out of 183 occurring on North Carolina roads.

"Although we're encouraged by the huge improvement in work safety in recent years, there's still more to be done," state Labor Commissioner Cherie Berry said. "I want to see us continue to expand our free consultative services and our safety training."

The labor department saw a major decline in fatalities in 2001, Berry's first year as labor commissioner. The total dropped to 203 from a previous high of 234 the year before. In 2002, the total dropped to 169, the record low for fatalities since recordkeeping began under the Occupational Safety and Health Administration Act. Last year, the total of 182 was the state's third-lowest total.

Compiled by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the state labor department, the 2004 figures show that 54 workers died in construction accidents. Another 20 employees died in manufacturing.

A total of 23 employees lost their lives to workplace violence. Six committed suicide and 17 were murdered.

Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting accounted for 17 deaths.

The labor department in recent years has sponsored throughout the state a series of free training seminars for construction workers. Labor inspectors have focused on areas that are the leading causes of construction deaths. These accidents include fatalities from falls, electrocutions, trenching and contact with heavy equipment.

Labor officials also are encouraging unique partnership agreements that allow safety inspectors free access to work sites to help spot dangers before accidents happen.

"We're trying new approaches," said Allen McNeely, the department's occupational safety and health director. "We've expanded our consultative services and our training, all free of charge. We're open to suggestions from employers and employees, and we've gotten a lot of help from different groups throughout the state."

Of the 183 fatalities, 128 were white, 26 were black and 26 were Hispanic. Of these, 175 were men and 8 were women.

Raw statistical figures are provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Other information concerning specific accidents is provided from information gathered during N.C. Department of Labor investigations.

The following counties had three or more fatalities:

Wake - 20

Forsyth, Mecklenburg - 8

Cumberland, Guilford - 7

Davidson, Pitt - 6

Buncombe, Catawba, Johnston - 5

Durham, Iredell, Onslow, Orange, Union - 4

New Hanover, Robeson – 3

Release: Immediate
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Dell, Whiting-Turner, NCDOL Unite to Recognize Construction Milestone

Winston-Salem-N.C. Department of Labor officials said Wednesday that a unique working agreement between the agency and Dell Inc. played a key role in the completion of the computer giant's huge facility.

"It's almost unheard of to build a facility of 760,000 square feet within a period of six months," Labor Commissioner Cherie Berry said. "I commend both Dell and Whiting-Turner for their outstanding performance and for their cooperation. If all major construction sites would work with us the way that Dell and Whiting-Turner have, North Carolina would be a much safer place for construction workers."

Berry said Dell and Whiting-Turner Contracting Company, the general contractor on the site, reached an agreement with the labor department that allowed the state agency to extend its safety consultative services at the construction site.

"We were concerned that this was an accident waiting to happen, especially considering the aggressive construction schedule which involved concrete poured in place tilt-up wall construction," said Terry Conrad, a labor department employee with the Consultative Services Bureau. Consultation visited the site regularly to consult with contractors and subcontractors on site.

"Most construction projects of this magnitude take anywhere from 28 to 30 months to complete," Conrad said. "It's still hard to believe that just nine weeks after the first footing was poured that the building was completely dried in."

In 2002, three workers lost their lives during a construction project in Greensboro. The workers were fatally injured when a tilt-up wall collapsed because of inadequate bracing. Tilt-up walls are poured on the ground and later raised and secured.

The labor department has intensified efforts to provide free consultative services and free training to employers and employees to help fight workplace fatalities.

"We can see we're making progress. We just need to make sure we extend this awareness to every construction site in the state," Berry said.

Release: Immediate
October 19, 2005
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Manufacturing Industry Recognizes Berry for Commitment to Safety

GREENSBORO-A strong commitment to safety in the manufacturing industry earned Labor Commissioner Cherie Berry recognition from the N.C. Manufacturers Association (NCMA).

Berry received the association's 2005 Chairman's Award for her focus on education and outreach the manufacturing industry and for her contribution an dedicated service to the business community and the citizens of North Carolina.

"Commissioner Berry serves the North Carolina taxpayers well with her value-added service approach to government," association chairman Randy Ramsey said. "She wants both business and workers across the state to benefit from the department's presence."

Berry made creating strong partnerships with the private sector one of her top priorities after being elected in 2000. She wants businesses and government to work together to create a safer North Carolina.

During Berry's tenure as labor commissioner, work fatalities have dropped from 234 in 2000 to 183 in 2004. In 2002, the state matched the record-low of 169 fatalities set in 1992. Injury and illness rates among workers have remained at a record-low for three years. She also created the country's first mobile training unit, Labor One, which can travel to any worksite in the state to provide free, customized training in English or Spanish.

"It's truly an honor to be recognized by the Manufacturing Association," Berry said. "They are an outstanding group of people to work with and I value their commitment to worker safety."

Berry received award on October 6 at the association's annual meeting in Greensboro.

Release: Immediate
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Subject: Youth Employment Certificates Available Online

An N.C. Department of Labor pilot computer program aimed at helping employers and school-age teenagers get youth employment certificates through the Internet has now been extended to all 100 North Carolina counties.

Instead of having to rely on the mail system, employers, teens and their parents can now get a work permit approved within minutes.

The pilot program began in August 2004 and marked the first time that a North Carolina employer, teen or parent was able to get a work permit online. Online accessibility did away with the need to obtain a copy of the form locally, mailing in the form for review and then waiting to see if the proposed workplace was allowed under the state's child labor laws.

Labor officials developed the online program-YEC Auto-to make it easier for employers and their teenage applicants to go through the application process. The program also reduces significantly the number of child labor law violations.

The link to the YEC Auto program, along with additional information on youth employment, is on the NCDOL Web site at <http://www.nclabor.com/wh/youth.htm>.

The Department of Labor issued more than 70,000 youth employment certificates in 2004.

Youth employment laws require anyone under age 18 to have a youth employment certificate. Youths age 16 or older can perform any job that is not hazardous or detrimental. Rules for 14- and 15-year-olds are more restrictive.