

News From **New Jersey Work Environment Council**

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New Jersey Issues Strong New Safeguards to Protect Health Care Workers and Patients from Lifting Injuries and Violence

Trenton, NJ – On September 6, 2011, the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) issued landmark New Jersey regulations for safe patient handling and violence prevention in hospitals and nursing homes.

Because of a campaign led by the Health Professionals and Allied Employees (HPAE), New Jersey's largest health care union, with support from other unions and the NJ Work Environment Council (WEC), NJ becomes the fourth state to implement strong safe patient handling laws and the first state to implement a violence prevention law covering health care employees.

Chronic back pain from unsafe patient lifting is a major reason why health care workers leave their jobs. In NJ, nurses, nurse aides, orderlies and attendants, combined, have the highest number of non-fatal occupational injuries and illnesses involving days away from work of all occupations.

Required worker-management committees are at the heart of both laws. The committees give frontline caregivers a voice to help prevent injuries from workplace violence and from unassisted patient lifts and transfers. These rules require facilities to establish joint committees with at least 50 percent of the members being health care workers from different jobs and to consult with unions regarding the selection of committee members.

According to WEC's Cecelia Gilligan Leto, WEC *Safe Work, Safe Care* Project Coordinator, "These rules will not just safeguard health care workers, but also the patients they care for. Union members will be on the frontlines to ensure that the law is implemented. Hospital and nursing home workers will become safer because of the

training, incident reporting, investigation, and evaluation requirements in the new rules,”
Leto said.

The regulations implement laws signed by Governor Jon Corzine in 2008. DHSS estimates that the rules apply to 465 hospitals and nursing homes. The two rules are in the *New Jersey Register* of September 6, 2011.

The New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC) is a non-profit alliance of 70 labor, community, and environmental organizations working for safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment. WEC can provide training to health care management and unions to help facilities comply with the new regulations.

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