



September 14, 2006

Oppose Isakson Amendment to Eliminate Safety & Health Protections for Port Workers

On behalf of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO, the International Longshoremen's Association, and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, I am writing to urge you to vote no on an amendment to the Port Security Bill, H.R. 4954, to be offered by Senator Isakson that would shield port employers from liability for employee injury and illness due to radiation exposure from screening devices.

We strongly oppose this amendment, which would have far-reaching consequences for longshore and port workers' safety and health and would eliminate the rights of workers to attain any compensation for serious radiation-related workplace injuries.

Gamma ray screening machines are used to screen cargo on the docks as one measure in enhancing our nation's port security. These devices are mandated by the Department of Homeland Security to screen cargo deemed to be at risk for dangerous substances. Workers and union officials have repeatedly been told, after installation of these devices at U.S. ports, that the use of this technology is safe and that there would be no adverse health effects. Yet there have been no independent studies conducted to verify this claim, and it remains unclear what health effects might be caused by repeated exposure to these rays.

If adverse health effects occur, workers must have some recourse to recover costs related to their illness. Under current law, longshore and other waterfront employees are covered by the Longshore and Harbor Workers' Compensation Act, a federally administered workers' compensation program under which benefits for injured employees are contributed by employers.

Senator Isakson's proposed amendment would not only prevent workers from recovering from employers directly, it would also bar employees with radiation-related illnesses from being compensated under the LHWCA since employers pay into this fund. This would leave tens of thousands of hard-working men and women with a gap in vital workers' compensation coverage. It is unthinkable that our federal government would require the use of radiation equipment in our nation's ports and expect port workers to put themselves at potential risk without any system of recourse in place for these employees in the event of injury.

Workers will not stand by as their right to a safe workplace is handed over in the name of security. We strongly urge you to oppose the Isakson amendment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edward Wytkind', written over a white background.

Edward Wytkind
President