



News Release

SERVICE EMPLOYEES
INTERNATIONAL UNION
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For Immediate Release
September 11, 2007

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As the nation commemorates the tragedies of September 11...

Security officers question impact of inadequate training, high turnover rates on public safety

New video of security officers calls current industry standards “insufficient”

As the nation prepares to commemorate the tragedies of September 11, private security officers around the country that protect commercial high-rise office buildings, ports, universities, government buildings, public transportation, banks and other critical sites are raising concerns about the impact of inadequate training standards on public safety. In a new video featuring interviews with security officers from San Francisco, Seattle, and Los Angeles, security officers are calling current industry standards insufficient preparation for either catastrophic events or daily safety risks to building tenants and the general public. **The video is available for viewing or podcast downloading at www.StandforSecurity.org.**

“I don’t feel the current level of training is adequate—all we’re required to have is first aid training,” said John Schroeder, a security officer whom protects an energy building in one of Seattle’s ports. “I feel it should be the responsibility of security officers to ensure public safety, if not just for the tenants, for the neighbors and the community.”

In an industry that employs more security officers than there are police officers in the United States, private security professionals are often the first line of defense to ensure the safety of building tenants, visitors, and the general public. Consequently, poor training standards and high turnover can have a devastating impact on building and community safety.

The critical role that private security officers play in public safety has long been overlooked. Commercial office buildings have been cited by intelligence agencies as terrorist targets; they have been vulnerable to fires, earthquakes, and other natural disasters. Yet while building incidents can pose a threat to tenants, visitors and property, the private security industry remains widely unregulated from state to state and has been plagued by high turnover and inadequate training for workers. Training programs for security officers are typically weak and ineffective, often consisting of watching a video and taking an open book test. In addition, the high turnover rates of 100-300% annually caused by the low standards in the industry inevitably affect the quality of service, regardless of the high integrity and dedication of individual security officers.

“Before the police get there, before the fire department gets there, before the paramedics get there, security officers are the first ones to be called,” said Jackie Johnson, a security officer for the last 18 years in Los Angeles. “But we don’t have the training we need to and there’s a lot of turnover.”

The concerns raised by security officers in the video come on the heels of a number of high-profile tragedies that have brought into question the nation’s infrastructure and preparedness to deal with crises ranging from natural disasters to the failure of man-made structures including highways and mineshafts. The video’s release coincides with a week of actions by security officers and community supporters in a number of cities, including:

- **SAN FRANCISCO.** Bay Area police officers, firemen, security officers, and faith and community leaders are holding a “Partners in Public Safety” press conference to highlight the need for reduced turnover and improved training standards for building security officers as first-line defenders.
- **PHILADELPHIA.** Security officers with Wackenhut Services are testifying at a Congressional field hearing chaired by Congressman Robert Brady (D-PA) about working conditions and the security situation at Independence National Historical Park, the site of the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall.

Contract Talks This Year Could Improve Safety, Help Stabilize Security Industry

Security officers in San Francisco, Washington, DC, Los Angeles, and Seattle have begun negotiations over first-ever union contracts that could help stabilize the workforce and ensure safer buildings. Through contract negotiations this year in these cities and others impacting as many as 50,000 largely African American workers, security officers are fighting to improve public safety while strengthening some of the nation’s most impoverished communities.

In cities like Chicago, where security officers have had a union contract for many years, workers have negotiated for improvements including an employer-paid training fund, on site training, and supplemental courses.

“By turning security jobs into good-paying jobs with health care, officers in some cities have been able to reduce turnover while improving training and safety standards,” said Valarie Long, National Director of SEIU’s Property Services Division. “Now security officers are working together to raise standards everywhere.”

Security officers around the country have been working together as part of a national campaign to turn dead-end security jobs into good jobs with decent wages and access to quality, affordable health care. The “Stand for Security Campaign” among private security officers—which has garnered the support of faith, political and labor leaders nationwide—is the largest effort to unite African American workers since the Pullman Porters formed the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in 1925 to help create the black middle class.

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With 1.9 million members, SEIU is the largest and fastest-growing union in North America and the largest property services union, representing more than 250,000 security officers, janitors, and other maintenance and custodial workers.