

Laid off federal NIOSH workers join Pittsburgh rally against Trump

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About 2,000 people attended the anti-Trump rally in Pittsburgh on Saturday, part of a broad range of protests held in every state and many cities, both large and small. These rallies reflected growing opposition to Trump's plans for dictatorship and war.

Among the participants in Pittsburgh were a group of federal workers who had learned just days earlier that they, along with 400 of their co-workers, would lose their jobs over the next two months. The layoffs are part of sweeping cuts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the entire Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), ordered by President Trump and Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., as part of their broader attack on federal workers and scientific research.

The affected workers are employed at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) facility south of Pittsburgh. This facility develops safety standards for underground and surface mining and tests respirators used in industries such as mining, healthcare and chemical manufacturing.

Several workers from the facility, located about 30 miles south of Pittsburgh, spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* on the condition of anonymity, fearing it might affect their chances of being rehired or finding other jobs.

"On Tuesday morning, we all received an email informing us that we were placed on administrative leave for one month," said a supervisor with over 10 years of service. "We were given that day to come into the office, turn in our IDs, and collect any personal belongings we had. This is devastating for both my family and workers around the country."

The workers take great pride in their contributions to workplace safety. "We are saving lives. We are making workplaces safer," said one worker. "If you have to

wear a respirator at your job, it must have a NIOSH tag. We certify that those respirators do what they are supposed to do."

The facility also operates two underground mines used for testing mine equipment and safety protocols. "It is the only working underground mine testing facility in the country," said another worker with nearly 15 years of service. "We test dust levels that can lead to black lung and silicosis—both incurable, deadly, and very painful diseases." The worker explained that continuous miners produce more rock dust in the air, increasing the risk of silicosis.

At another mine on-site, workers test roof collapse risks and determine the strength of pillars needed to support mine roofs. "This isn't just for coal mining but for all types of mining," they added. "Closing us down will make it less safe for workers everywhere." They emphasized, "When you're working inside a factory with poisonous chemicals, your exposure is very different from someone sitting in their backyard. We ensure respirators protect workers from those products."

NIOSH announced layoffs at its Cincinnati testing facility as well, which employs around 200 people, which the Pittsburgh workers described as shocking. They explained that NIOSH is not a regulatory agency but a research body that establishes safety standards used across the US and globally.

The layoffs will occur in two phases: Supervisors were placed on administrative leave and will be laid off at the end of April; union employees received a 60-day notice, with their last day set for June 2.

"We have mortgages, kids, and car payments," said one worker. "I think I'll be good for about six months, but if I can't find a job after that, things will get really tough." Another worker with five years of experience

said it was difficult to continue working under such circumstances: “It’s going to be really hard going into work knowing I won’t have a job in 60 days. Right now, it’s just 50.”

“Everybody’s morale is down,” added another worker. “Nobody says anything in emails anymore—it’s all offline discussions.”

When asked why these layoffs were happening, one worker speculated it was due to artificial intelligence: “As far as we know, they never talked with anyone at the facility to see what we were doing. I think they just used AI to scan our website for keywords like ‘Environmental Protection’ or ‘testing facilities’ and assumed we were redundant.”

Another worker saw this as part of Trump’s broader attack on science: “The Trump administration doesn’t value science or facts. They want to cut regulations on businesses and prevent anyone from having evidence to prove harm.”

Criticism was also directed at Robert F. Kennedy Jr., with one worker saying: “Kennedy is a piece of work. He shouldn’t be in charge of anything related to people’s health.” Another worker added, “Now he is destroying what the EPA is supposed to be doing.”

Frustration was also voiced about the Democratic Party’s role in enabling Trump’s policies. “It’s hard to understand,” said one worker. “It’s like they’re afraid to stand up to Trump or think they don’t have any power.” Another worker bluntly noted that Democrats approved Trump’s budget, saying, “Neither party stands for the workers.”

The Pittsburgh NIOSH facility being closed dates back 115 years, to 1910, when it was opened under the Bureau of Mines to develop safety standards for coal mining. NIOSH itself was established in 1971 under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 alongside OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration). While NIOSH focuses on research and developing workplace safety standards, OSHA is responsible for setting and enforcing regulations based on NIOSH’s findings.

This landmark legislation was passed by Congress during an era marked by massive working class struggles in the 1950s and 1960s for better wages, improved conditions, and job safety. The United Mine Workers played a significant role by fighting for mine safety reforms and action against black lung disease—an

excruciatingly painful and deadly condition that claimed thousands of miners’ lives annually.

However, starting in the 1980s and 90s, many gains from earlier struggles began to be clawed back as attacks on workers’ living standards intensified. Congress weakened reforms meant to protect worker safety. For example, NIOSH recommended reducing coal dust exposure to 1 mg/m³ as early as 1995; however, this standard wasn’t adopted until nearly 20 years later, in 2014, and even then, companies found ways around it.

The defense of worker safety will not be achieved through appeals to either the Trump administration or Democrats in Congress—or even through legal action in courts. The way forward is through the building of a Federal Workers Rank-and-File Committee, as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), to mobilize federal workers in unity with other sectors of the working class—such as auto manufacturing, transportation, education and healthcare—in a common struggle against Trump’s efforts to establish a fascist dictatorship in the US, which the Democrats have fully enabled.

NIOSH employees who wish to join this fight should fill out the form below and speak out against Trump’s attacks on public health workers.



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