

## OSHA's Complicity

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 30 - Accusing the Bush administration of failing to protect workers, Senator John Edwards of North Carolina will announce a plan to decrease workplace deaths and injuries by strengthening laws and hiring more federal safety personnel, his campaign said Tuesday.

Mr. Edwards, one of nine candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination, will call for the hiring of an advocate at the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to increase prosecutions of companies that are found responsible for workplace deaths and require them to note those deaths in their annual reports. The advocate would also notify workers and their unions of pending criminal cases.

"George Bush did not enact new laws or increase funding to protect our workers," Mr. Edwards said in remarks released by his campaign on Tuesday for delivery in Iowa on Wednesday. "He did not push employers to better protect their employees. He did the exact opposite. He rolled back worker safety standards, and made them voluntary. He proposed cutting OSHA's work force by 77 people. And he continues to ensure that breaking existing laws amounts to nothing more than a slap on the wrist."

A campaign aide said Mr. Edwards was reacting to articles in The New York Times that found that from 1982 to 2002, OSHA declined to seek prosecution in 93 percent of the 1,242 cases in which the agency concluded that workers had died because of "willful" safety violations.

Calls to OSHA and President Bush's campaign office were not returned. The agency's administrator, John L. Henshaw, has acknowledged that it referred few cases to prosecutors but said it sought criminal sanctions to the fullest extent possible. Workplace deaths over all have declined in the past five years, Mr. Henshaw has said.

Mr. Edwards said his plan would mandate certain safety measures in an effort to reduce the nearly two million ergonomic injuries each year and raise staffing levels at nursing homes to reduce the likelihood of injuries to workers.