One of America’s best kept secrets is the number of working men and women killed or injured daily in its industries. Of course, when a major disaster strikes, the papers and television are full of the story. But every day workers lose fingers and arms, are crushed by machinery, killed by explosions or industrial fires, poisoned by dust and chemicals, and permanently disabled by repetitive motion in office and factory.

These songs are dedicated to the 70,000 workers who are killed or permanently disabled on the job each year in the United States. We hope these songs will act as a spur to strengthen state and national safety and industrial health laws, and will inspire workers and others to intensify the fight for safety at the work site.

SIDE ONE:
MORE THAN A PAYCHECK — The devastating effects of exposure to toxic substances on the job can extend far beyond the workers themselves. Physical and emotional harm is done to families, whole communities, and even generations of unborn children. Composed by Ysaye Barnwell and sung by Sweet Honey in the Rock.

NUMBER 21 MINE — “The coal miner is never alone, for death is all about him.” This is Kenny Winfree’s tribute to the men and women who go down in the mines “where the dangers are double and the pleasures are few, where the rain never falls and the sun never shines.” Composed and sung by Kenny Winfree.

TAXI SONG — Peter Jones wrote this song from his personal experience as a taxi driver in a suburb of Washington, D.C. The taxi driver, like a number of other occupations, is considered an “independent contractor.” Thus, he is not an employee and is not eligible for any worker benefits. At the end of each day the driver pays the company for the use of the cab. He must drive long hours to come out ahead. Composed by Peter Jones and sung by Joe Glazer.

SOUND ENGINEERING — Bobby Cumberland, chairman of the safety committee of United Steelworkers Local 8907 in Kansas City, Missouri, has written dozens of songs about worker safety and occupational health. This is his plea for sound engineering and acoustic design to help protect our hearing. Composed and sung by Bobby Cumberland.

SONG FOR SANDHOGS — The sandhog digs tunnels under rivers and through mountains for trains and automobiles. He digs the underground aqueducts for water which is carried for many miles to our cities. It is one of the most dangerous jobs around. Composed and sung by Larry Penn.
THE PROCESS MAN (CHEMICAL WORKERS' SONG) — Working in a chemical plant can mean a slow death for some as the fumes and gases gradually damage the lungs, brain and bloodstream. But men and women will do desperate things to feed their families and pay the rent and there is always the hope that they will be one of those lucky ones who beat the odds. Composed by Ron Angel and sung by the duo, Magpie.

THE RIGHT TO KNOW — Every year workers are exposed to new chemicals and processes on the job. What will these substances do to their eyes, lungs and the rest of their bodies as the years go by? Labor unions are demanding the right to know what risks workers are exposed to when they are using these new chemicals. Composed by Sam Stark and sung by Joe Glazer.

TELL ME THEIR NAMES — On April 28, 1987, 28 workers were killed when an office building under construction in Bridgeport, Connecticut, collapsed. Carl Fichtenbaum was a young doctor on duty in the Bridgeport hospital when the mangled bodies and the injured were brought in. This is his song about that experience. It was first sung at the dedication of the monument to the dead workers one year after the accident. Composed and sung by Carl Fichtenbaum. Back up instrumentation by Eddie Starr.

WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY — Subsequent to the Bridgeport disaster, the AFL-CIO designated April 28 as Workers' Memorial Day to commemorate the tens of thousands of workers who are killed, injured or permanently disabled on the job each year. Composed and sung by Bobby Cumberland.

SIDE TWO:

VDT — Occupational disease or injury can occur in the office as well as in the coal mine or textile mill. Working on a video terminal in the office for long periods of time can cause eye damage, headaches and other bodily injury. Composed and sung by Tom Juravich.

CARPAL TUNNEL — Repetitive motion on the assembly line, in the office, or wherever one happens to be working can cause “carpal tunnel syndrome.” Many workers may not understand the full technical meaning of this phrase but they do know it can mean excruciating pain, surgery and crippled hands and arms. Composed and sung by John O'Connor.

DRILL YE TARRIERS DRILL — Dynamite was the constant companion of the Irish rock drillers (called tarriers) as they built the nation's railroads more than 100 years ago. Men were maimed and blown up regularly. Humorous songs like this one helped relieve the tension but the danger was always there. Composed by Thomas Casey and sung by Joe Glazer.

100% COTTON DUST — Cotton moves from the fields, to the textile mills, to the sewing factories, to the retail stores and ends up as 100% cotton sheets or shirts. But years of breathing cotton dust can cause “brown lung” disease and the unsuspecting textile worker can end up barely able to walk across the room. Composed and sung by Ngoma and Jaribu Hill.

SONG FOR THE UNKNOWN WORKER — John O'Connor pays tribute to the unknown worker who gives his life and his health producing the goods and services that keep the nation going. Composed and sung by John O'Connor.

THE HAMMER SONG — In this steel plant workers are almost certain to go deaf in time and they'll be lucky if they retire with all their fingers intact. Composed and sung by Larry Penn.

COAL TATOO — Rock falls, methane gas explosions, black lung, accidents, fires are all part of the life of the underground coal miner. “Digging dusky diamonds” to provide energy for the nation does not come cheap or easy. Composed by Billy Ed Wheeler and sung by Laurel Blyades.

CORRIDO DEL MINERO — Workers of Hispanic descent work not only in the fields picking the crops. They can be found in hotels and restaurants, on the railroads and in the building trades, teaching school, working in hospitals, in factories and down in the mines. This traditional song originated with Hispanic miners in the Southwest. Sung by Joe Glazer.

WE JUST COME TO WORK HERE, WE DON'T COME TO DIE — This song was written by Harry Stamp in a lockhouseman in Conneaut, Bay, Oregon, whose union contract backs him up when he refuses to work on an unsafe job. Lyrics updated and sung by Anne Feeney.