

LATINO AND HISPANIC AMERICAN ACHIEVEMENTS IN SAFETY

Latino/a/e/x and Hispanic Americans have made and are making significant contributions to occupational safety and health. Recognizing and exploring these contributions throughout each year helps our profession learn from the past, celebrate excellence and work toward a safer, healthier and stronger future.

During National Latino and Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15 - Oct. 15), read about 10 leaders who have improved the lives of workers and the safety of the public at large through their activism, innovation, engineering and public service.



Helen Rodríguez Trías

A native of Puerto Rico, Rodríguez Trías started her career in hospitals where she advocated for workers to have a voice in administrative and patient care issues. Later, she worked to end forced sterilization and advocated on behalf of women with HIV. In 1993, she became the first Hispanic director of the American Public Health Association.



Dolores Huerta

Huerta co-founded the National Farm Workers Association (later known as the United Farm Workers) with Cesar Chavez and has worked tirelessly since to secure better wages and working conditions for farmworkers. In the 1970s, she successfully campaigned to ban the use of the pesticide dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) on grape and lettuce ranches.



Bonnie Castillo

As executive director of National Nurses United, the largest union for registered nurses in the U.S., Castillo has fought for better wages, working conditions and other workplace protections for nurses. She was instrumental in pushing for better PPE and higher hospital safety standards for healthcare workers at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Tom Perez

As U.S. secretary of labor from 2013-2017, Perez worked to establish new safety rules, including an updated standard reducing the permissible silica dust exposure level by half. Perez is currently a senior advisor to the president and director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs.



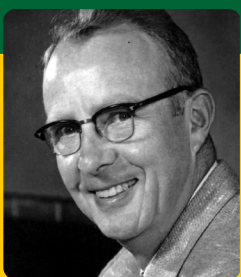
Irelys Martí-Sánchez

As an industrial hygienist for the Safety, Health and Environmental Management Office under the Overseas Building Operations, Martí-Sánchez works to assess risks, implement controls and investigate incidents. She has won awards for her support of the Bureau of Medical Services and expansion of the DriveCam initiative to reduce motor vehicle fatalities.



Judy Mitrani-Reiser

Mitrani-Reiser pursued a career in STEM to become associate chief of the Materials and Structural Systems Division (Engineering Laboratory) of the National Institute of Standards and Technology, where she worked to improve building safety and famously investigated the Surfside condo collapse in Florida and Hurricane Maria's impact on Puerto Rico. She is now a senior research scientist at NIST.



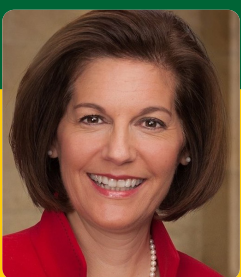
Luis Walter Alvarez

A prolific physicist, Alvarez designed a radio distance and direction indicator, which led to a landing system for aircraft and a radar system for locating planes, improving military safety during World War II. In 1968, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics for the discovery of new particles and resonance states using a hydrogen bubble chamber.



Emma Tenayuca

Labor organizer and civil rights activist Tenayuca organized pecan shellers in a 1938 strike over poor working conditions — shelling centers lacked proper ventilation and workers suffered higher-than-average rates of tuberculosis — and wage cuts. Striking workers won higher wages and the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act passed later that year.



Catherine Cortez Masto

Cortez Masto represents the state of Nevada as the first Latina ever elected to the U.S. Senate. Amid record-setting temperatures in her state, she introduced legislation aimed at protecting workers from extreme heat exposure. She sits on the subcommittee for Consumer Protection, Product Safety, Insurance and Data Security.



Rafael Gonzalez

As a director at Sandia Labs, one of three research and development labs of the U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration, Gonzalez ensures safe operations in programs critical to national security. He also created Noche de Ciencias (Science Night) in New Mexico, which leads middle school students through STEM activities.