

**Tower Climber Safety Workshop**  
**Prepared Remarks of FCC Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn**  
**Washington, DC**  
**October 14, 2014**

Mrs. Pierce, I join you and other participants, here today, because I believe that this workshop represents both a significant and positive step towards improving the safety of those workers, who build and maintain our wireless infrastructure. Chairman Wheeler and Secretary Perez are to be commended for addressing this issue in such a proactive way.

Our wireless networks are expanding at an amazing rate and are meeting the critical information needs of our nation like never before. Even with these enormous benefits we must never lose sight of those who build these networks and the dangers that they face. They are often young; some are relatively inexperienced; and others are not represented by unions. So collectively, we have a special responsibility, when it comes to their safety.

According to some reports, the fatality rate for tower climbers is as high as ten times the rate of the general construction industry. I am aware of the toll it has taken on my home state of South Carolina, where in June of 2007, a 30 year-old tower technician fell 140 feet from a tower in Bluffton, South Carolina and, in that same month, a technician fell 170 feet from a tower in Summerville, South Carolina. That young technician was Mrs. Kathy Pierce's only son, and while I know this is difficult for you, we are grateful that you are here with us today sharing your comments about the loss of Chad, and for dedicating yourself to raising awareness about the dangers workers face in the telecommunications industry.

One tower worker fatality is one too many. Our goal should be that no more families have to suffer the way you have. To get to zero, will require 100% of the effort, from 100% of those in the room, to build the safety systems we need: From wireless companies, to service providers, to tower companies –100% of the power and 100% of the tools to achieve 100% safety.

I have been impressed with OSHA's efforts to meet this goal. In his February 2014 letter to the communications tower industry, Dr. David Michaels sent a strong message that, since 2012, we have seen an unacceptable increase in tower worker deaths. As he put it, every one of those deaths was preventable and a high proportion of those deaths were due to inadequate fall protection. He reminded tower worker employers, of their obligation to provide employees with appropriate fall protection, and the employer must consistently supervise and enforce the use, of such protection.

Last month, OSHA sent another strong message to the tower worker industry when it proposed a fine of more than \$134,000 against a wireless construction company for several willful and serious safety violations. These actions demonstrate how serious OSHA is at achieving a zero percent fatality rate.

As discussed at today's workshop, we need to develop new and innovative tools for identifying and addressing specific risks. It may be that we need a "sign-before-you-climb" approach that assesses climber-specific and job-specific risks at each job site in advance and on the day of the job before any worker even climbs a tower. It may be that we need to rethink the safety provisions in the contracts between wireless companies and service vendors. And we may need to keep regulatory options on the table. All of these options must be part of the conversation going forward.

The collaboration between the Commission and the Department of Labor that resulted in this workshop is to be applauded and continued. I also appreciate the wireless industry's willingness to work

in a positive way with the Commission and the Department of Labor and strongly encourage the wireless industry to continue this productive engagement. I would like to join others in thanking all of the panelists, speakers, workshop organizers, and specifically the Wireless Bureau, for making this extremely important workshop possible.