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Workers Say Scaffolding Act Repeal Won't Hurt Safety

SPRINGFIELD, Ill (AP) — Construction worker Bill Owens said his job is no more dangerous now than it was before Gov. Jim Edgar repealed the scaffolding act.

"Most contractors try to protect workers, because if they don't, their insurances rate will go up," Owens said. "I'd say 99 percent of the contractors try to make the workplace safe and I don't think that will change."

Owens was putting the finishing touches on a Springfield retirement center about the time Edgar signed repeal of the 88-year-old law Tuesday. The scaffolding act had given workers a second avenue to sue for on-the-job injuries.

Owens and workers at two construction sites in Springfield said they do not consider repeal of the act a blow against labor. They said worker

compensation laws and federal safety standards compel employers to keep job sites safe.

Edgar said the act's repeal will not undermine worker safety and will help make Illinois more friendly to business.

Construction executives said they now will be able to expand and give workers more benefits.

"By repealing this law it puts Illinois in a much better position as we try to make sure we develop our economic potential," Edgar said. "It will not endanger the safety of workers in Illinois. There are still ample protections on the books to make sure that if worker safety is not taken into consideration, that employer will pay the price."

Injured workers testified before a Senate panel this month that some contractors, in their haste to meet

deadlines, often ignore standards. But the construction workers interviewed Tuesday said they must take responsibility for their own safety.

"Sometimes a little common sense is needed," said Frank Musgrove, a plumber working at the new Springfield municipal building. "union men won't work on something that isn't safe."

Nonunion workers at the retirement center said they would walk off a site they thought was unsafe.

Larry Maddox, also working at the municipal building said lawyers — not construction workers — have to most to lose by the law's repeal.

"You know who has been fighting this. It's the attorneys. They're not going to be able to get their cut now," Maddox said. "I can see what the Republicans are aiming at. A lot of people are taking advantage of the law."