

## In Memoriam: James M. Melius, MD, DrPH

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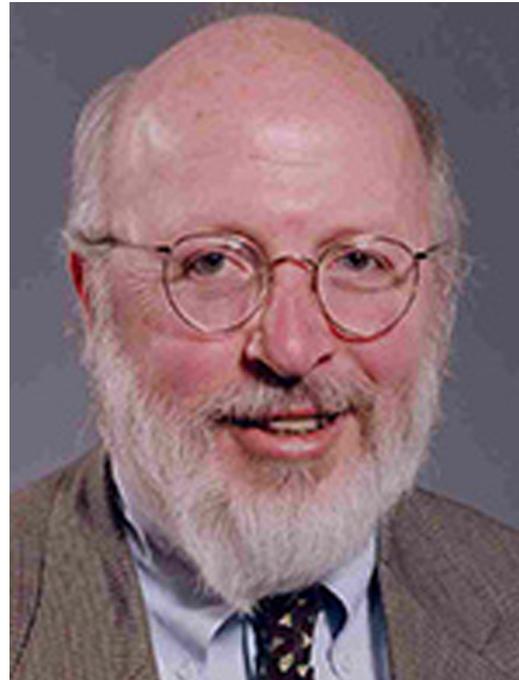
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James M. Melius, MD, DrPH, was an occupational physician and a national and international leader in occupational medicine and epidemiology. He was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in 1948 and died of cardiac arrest in Copake Falls, New York, on 1 January 2018 at the age of 69.

Melius was the principal architect of the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act of 2011, the federal law that supports an extensive program of medical monitoring and health care for first responders, volunteers, and survivors of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, as well as the Shanksville, Pennsylvania, crash site of 11 September 2001. This act also reopened the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund, which has provided more than \$3 billion in compensation to injured and ill 9/11 responders and survivors to date. With his knowledge of medicine and health policy, his multiple connections to legislators and labor leaders, and an uncanny sense of political timing, Melius drafted the version of the Zadroga Bill that was successfully passed by Congress in a dramatic lame-duck session in the last days of 2010 and was signed into law by President Barack Obama in January 2011. Melius worked with labor leaders across the United States, especially with the firefighters', police, and construction workers' unions; with Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D), Chuck Schumer (D), and Hillary Clinton (D); and with Representatives Carolyn Maloney (D-Manhattan), Jerrold Nadler (D-Manhattan), and Peter King (R-Long Island) to support passage of this landmark bipartisan legislation.

Melius dedicated his professional life to protecting the health and safety of working men and women through both research and action. From 1980 to 1987, he directed the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's (NIOSH's) renowned Health Hazards Evaluations and Technical Assistance Branch based in Cincinnati. From 1987 to 1994, he served under Governor Mario Cuomo as director of the Center for Environmental Health in the New York State Department of Health, where he oversaw the establishment of a statewide network of Centers of Excellence in Occupational Health and Safety. This network, the only one of its kind in the United States, continues to this day; it formed the backbone of the medical response to 9/11. From 1994 until his death, he was the administrator of the New York State Laborers' Health and Safety Trust Fund and the research director for the Laborers' Health and Safety Fund of North America, organizations affiliated with the Laborers' International Union of North America.

Melius developed a special relationship with the unions for the building and construction trades and spent much of his career improving safety and health on construction sites. Until the late 1980s, this industrial sector, which contains some of the most hazardous workplaces in America, had been neglected by researchers and policy makers alike. Melius helped end that neglect by



James M. Melius, 1948–2018. Image: Courtesy of Laborers' International Union of North America.

assisting the Laborers' International Union in the development of a unique national program that encompassed not only occupational safety and health but also health promotion activities such as smoking cessation. This was the first—and still the only—national worker protection program to use health insurance premiums to support occupational safety and health. He also forged an agreement between NIOSH and the construction industry to create the National Construction Safety and Health Research Program. As a result of these efforts, 500 fewer workers die each year on construction sites today than in 1990.

In 1983, Melius was appointed chairman of the Medical Advisory Board for the International Association of Fire Fighters. There, he conducted research on occupationally induced hearing loss, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asbestosis, and cardiovascular disease in firefighters and was instrumental in securing passage in many states and Canadian provinces of laws that presume cardiac deaths or cancer deaths in firefighters to be occupationally related and therefore deserving of compensation. Melius also championed the development and implementation of medical monitoring programs for first responders across North America.

At the time of his death, Melius was chair of the Presidential Advisory Board on Radiation and Worker Health, which addresses compensation for cancers caused by ionizing radiation in workers employed in nuclear weapons facilities in the United States. In New York City, he was chair of the steering committee for the World Trade Center Medical Monitoring and Treatment Program and was a founding member of the board of directors of 9/11 Health Watch. He served on multiple advisory committees to the New York state and federal governments and to the National Academy of Sciences.

Melius was for many years a fellow, and since 2012 the treasurer, of the Collegium Ramazzini, an independent international society in occupational and environmental health headquartered at the Castello di Bentivoglio near Bologna, Italy. The Collegium is dedicated to the protection of occupational and environmental health; it is named in honor of Bernardino Ramazzini, who was an Italian physician during the 17th century and is considered the

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father of occupational and environmental medicine. In 2012, Melius received the Collegium Ramazzini's Irving J. Selikoff Memorial Award in recognition of his "lifetime's work of protecting working men and women from occupational hazards and his heroic service on behalf of the 9/11 rescue workers."

Melius graduated from Brown University in 1970 with an AB in biology, obtained an MD from the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Chicago in 1974, and obtained a DrPH degree from the University of Illinois School of Public Health in 1984. His clinical training took place at Cook County Hospital in Chicago; he was board certified in General Preventive Medicine and Occupational Medicine and published extensively in top-ranked occupational and

public health journals. He served for 20 years as an adjunct faculty member of the Department of Environmental Medicine and Public Health at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City. He is survived by his wife, Melanie, and two sons, Jeremy and Ehren.

The beneficiaries of Jim Melius's lifetime of dedication to occupational health and safety are the tens of thousands of workers across America who have been spared injury and premature death because of his work, and the firefighters, police officers, paramedics, construction workers, and volunteers who participated in the rescue, recovery, and rebuilding operations at Ground Zero, the site of the World Trade Center, in the days, weeks, and months after 9/11.