

Meeting the Challenges of Reaching Low-Wage Workers

Using Community Health and Safety Trainings

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Background

This one-hour training program for low-wage workers aimed to increase workers' degree of concern about safety and health to reduce workplace injuries and illnesses.

- Low-wage workers are a vulnerable population often overlooked by traditional health and safety training methods.
- Low-wage workers have high rates of injury and illness due to poor working conditions and high hazard jobs (Michaels, 2015).
- Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) with established connections to low-wage workers can engage and educate these workers using health and safety trainings.

Methods

- This project was a collaborative effort by the Fair Work Center, their partner organizations, and health and safety professionals at the University of Washington.
- Features of the one-hour curriculum:

Utilizes a lay health worker/promotora model

Piloted the curriculum with CBOs

Adaptable to the target audience based on language, technology, and content needs

Focuses on worker rights

Illustrates concepts with workplace scenarios

Relies on visuals and participant interactivity

Modeled on similar training programs



Acknowledges Barriers for Workers:

- Limited language ability
- Lack of protections for some types of hazards or worker contract types
- Documentation status
- The complexity of regulations
- Lack of support from employers or fear of retaliation



A One-Hour Health and Safety Curriculum

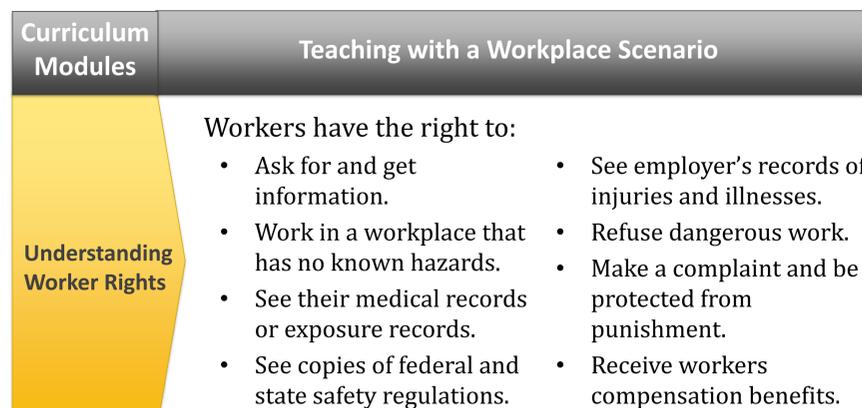


Figure 1. Hazard identification using a workplace scenario illustrates the four categories of job hazards

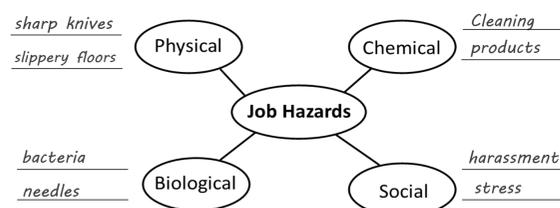


Figure 2. Safety Strategies

- 1 Remove the Hazard
 - 2 Control the Hazard
 - 3 Improve Policy & Procedures
 - 4 Wear Personal Protective Equipment
- The four safety strategies are modelled on the traditional hierarchy of controls.
 - The strategies are in order of effectiveness with removing the hazard as the most effective.
 - Safety strategies often require employer support.

Each unique hazard scenario will dictate how workers prioritize seeking help:

- Work with employers and co-workers.
- Report a problem to authorities.
- Receive health care.
- Seek out community resources.



Photo credit: AdobeStock

The Message for Workers

Workers have the right to receive health and safety information and use their rights to ensure protection from hazards in the workplace.

Workers in our society do not share an equal risk of injury and illness. Safety and health at work depend on who you are and your work situation. In all cases, there are actions you can take to improve safety and reduce risk in your workplace.

Workplace injuries and illness are unacceptable. Safety strategies and support are available for reducing harm in the workplace.

Conclusion

Summary:

- This one-hour training curriculum focuses on worker empowerment and addresses the resources vulnerable low-wage workers need to enhance health and safety knowledge, hazard recognition, and problem-solving skills.
- Addressing barriers to taking action and providing supportive community resources are vital for reaching low-wage workers.
- Regulation and enforcement do not protect workers from all of the hazards they encounter and are particularly limited in addressing psychosocial hazards, such as harassment and stress.
- This community-based participatory research project was a challenging, iterative process, but the result is a training program well-suited to the target audience.

Next steps:

- CBOs will deliver this one-hour awareness training to their constituents working in diverse industries.
- Two-hour health and safety problem-solving clinics will address individual worker questions.

Reference:

Michaels, D. (2015). *Adding inequality to injury: the costs of failing to protect workers on the job*. Occupational Safety & Health Administration, US Department of Labor, Washington DC.
 The curriculum was inspired by: Workplace Health and Safety ESOL Curriculum. Jenny Lee Utech, Mass. Worker Education Roundtable, ©2005. Handout 9. Worker Rights Under OSHA.
 "Preventing Violence in the Workplace: A health and safety curriculum for young workers" by U.C. Berkeley Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP) & Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (MASSCOSH). OSHA's 11: An OSHA 10 curriculum for young workers. Northwest Center for Occupational Health and Safety, Pacific Northwest OSHA Education Center.