

Summary of 2008 OHIP Projects

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* UNITE HERE: UNITE = Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees,
 HERE = Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees

San Francisco Bay Area

1. Sky Chefs and Lean Production: Ramifications for Health and Safety

Worksite sponsor: UNITE HERE Local 2850

Interns: First year medical student, UCSF

Undergraduate, UC Berkeley, Conservation of Natural Resources

UNITE-HERE Local 2850 represents over 10,000 airline catering workers, mostly immigrant women. One of the largest companies has recently instituted a national initiative to increase production in all of their kitchens by implementing a “Lean Production System.” The interns sought to document the effects of lean production on the health and safety of these workers. Providing this information to the union will improve their ability to represent their members around health and safety issues. Site visits to kitchens in Los Angeles, San Jose, and Oakland were supplemented with 27 worker surveys in Los Angeles and Minneapolis and 30 interviews at various locations.

The team found that increased production load correlated with poorer health (physical, mental, and emotional) and safety in the workplace. Ergonomic hazards included poorly maintained food carts and trucks as well as heavy lifting of food and beverage containers. As a result, over half of the workforce used medication to relief pain to the lower back, shoulder, and neck. The company failed to supply adequate personal protective equipment, relying on their low-wage employees to provide winter coats and gloves when working in cold foods room. Dishwashers were only provided one pair of gloves each year.

The original lean production model developed by Toyota includes worker involvement and participation in constant revising of the production system. However, this airline catering company did not implement these elements of the model. Instead, they demanded overtime, limited breaks, and increased pressure and workload among the workforce over the last 2-3 years.

Final Product: The team produced a report to the union that provided background on the history of lean production methods, a summary of the findings of their summer work, and a set of recommendations to improve worksite health and safety. They also provided the union with a booklet for union staff.

2. Home Care Workers Partnership for Worker Health and Safety

Worksite Sponsors: Services Employees Int'l Union Local 616
Alameda County Public Authority for In-Home Supportive Services

Interns: First year medical student, UCSF/UCB
Nursing student, Mills College

Homecare workers enable elderly and handicapped individuals to remain in their own homes by performing housecleaning and personnel care activities. They are not only one of the fastest growing health care occupational groups, but also one of the groups with the highest occupational injury rate, about 70% higher than the rate for the general workforce. Most home care workers are women, many of whom are recent immigrants. Earning just \$10.50 with no paid holidays or vacation, over a third of these workers and their families live below the federal poverty level. They typically receive little or no health and safety training and are not provided with the tools and equipment needed to safely completed required job tasks.

The OHIP Interns joined a larger team of researchers on a project including the UC Berkeley Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP), the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the Alameda County Public Authority for In-Home Supportive Services, and the funder, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

The goal of the OHIP interns over the summer was to assist in the development of the educational materials identified through a previous needs assessment and then develop a social marketing plan to promote dissemination of these materials.

Final Product: The interns provided the research partners with a detailed set of recommended vignettes distilled from interviews with health care workers and customers to be incorporated into educational materials as illustrations of common hazards and practical tips that can be followed to reduce hazards. They also developed an updated guide of local resources for the workers and customers to get additional information and help.

3. Overhead Drill Project with Construction Trades

Worksite sponsor: UC Ergonomics Program

Interns: Master of Environmental Health student,
Colorado State University

First year student in a post-baccalaureate pre-medicine program,
Mills College

One of the most physically demanding tasks in the construction industry is overhead drilling into concrete for the attachment of anchors and bolts which are used to hand plumbing pipes and sprinkler systems, ventilation ducts, and electrical wiring. The interns continued the work of 2004 OHIP interns with the UC Ergonomics Program. They focused on promoting the use of the fourth generation of an overhead drill press designed to reduce the musculoskeletal strain of overhead drilling.

The students set up a series of meetings with unions, contractors, apprenticeship programs, and other construction organizations, gave demonstrations of the new tool, and obtained feedback on its design and potential use.

Final Product: They developed media tools for outreach including a PowerPoint with video clips demonstrating to use of the new equipment and improved the Overhead Drilling Project's website to make it more accessible to worker and employer populations.

4. Workers in the Woods: H-2B Guest Workers and Labor Intensive Forestry in the Pacific Northwest

Worksite sponsor: Alliance of Forest Workers and Harvesters

Intern: Master of Public Health student, UC Berkeley, epidemiology

In northern California and throughout the Pacific Northwest, forestry workers plant trees, thin the forest understory, and hand-pile brush. Most of this labor-intensive work occurs on public lands under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management. These government agencies contract out the most labor intensive forestry work, and under the H-2B "guest worker" visa program, thousands of guest workers enter the U.S. from Mexico and Central America each year to perform manual labor in the forest. Their work is difficult and dangerous; they work in rain, snow, mud, and heat. Their tools are chainsaws, machetes and hoes. Previous investigative news stories have documented that the "pineros" receive minimal training and are routinely and systematically denied fair wages and safety and health protections.

H-2B workers speak of being denied treatment for injuries, verbally abused by their supervisors, and threatened with deportation if they complain about their working conditions. Many workers

arrive in the U.S. already in debt for expenses paid to corrupt labor contractors who charge them exorbitant fees for obtaining visas and travel arrangements. Yet they are often working on government land and are paid with federal taxpayer dollars.

The OHIP intern worked with the Alliance of Forest Workers and Harvesters to identify and collect public records on the regulations governing the health and safety and labor standards for this unique category of guest workers.

Final product: The intern provided the Alliance of Forest Workers and Harvesters with a reference binder summarizing current research on worker health and safety in labor-intensive forestry work, focusing on issues relevant to H-2B guest workers. She identified contract inspection data and contract oversight procedures and developed recommendations for future research and improved public policy.

5. Chinese Restaurant Worker Health and Safety Partnership Program

Worksite sponsor: Chinese Progressive Association

Intern: DrPH candidate, UC Berkeley School of Public Health

Little research has been conducted on occupational health and safety in restaurants, particularly among immigrant populations. Building on the previous work by OHIP interns in 2005 and 2006 with the Chinese Progressive Association and the Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP), a community-based participatory research (CBPR) partnership has been formed between a community organization, academic researchers at UC Berkeley, and the local public health department, focusing on San Francisco's Chinatown. The collaborative has been conducting a survey of Chinatown restaurant workers, piloting a worker safety inspection checklist and conducting a participatory evaluation of the partnership and its work. OHIP assigned a student to work part-time with the partnership over the past academic year; this placement is an alternative to the regular OHIP model of a full-time effort over a short eight-week period in the summer.

The intern has focused on an overall evaluation of the effectiveness of various approaches used by the partnership to include workers as equal partners in an academic research project. By attending various meetings and focus groups, she has been able to provide feedback that can be continually incorporated into a process of improving the communication and effective functioning of the partnership.

Final product: A final report will be completed by March 2009

Los Angeles and San Diego:

6. Heat Stress in Industrial Laundries

Worksite sponsor: UNITE HERE Local 52
National Health and Safety Office

Interns: Master of Science student, Public Health, UCLA
Undergraduate in Chicana/o Studies, UCLA

Employees of industrial laundry facilities are exposed to many hazards in the workplace. In Southern California, heat in laundry facilities may pose a serious threat to the health of these employees. The focus of this project was to measure and document the temperature and relative humidity inside two industrial laundry facilities in Los Angeles in order to assess the potential hazard of heat stress. In addition to documenting a hazard, it provides additional support of the need for Cal/OSHA to expand its outdoor heat regulation to cover indoor workplaces.

An integral part of the project design was to involve the Health and Safety Committee members in every stage of the summer project. The interns created water logs that were used by workers to measure and record their daily water intake, number of bathroom breaks, productivity, and drinks consumed with breakfast and lunch. The interns conducted a series of educational sessions over a week to train a core group of workers to monitor and document temperature and humidity levels at their facility using Extech data loggers.

They found that temperatures varied greatly between and within departments; heat index measures reached up to 117°F. The heat data identified the priority work areas to reduce heat exposure through improved ventilation and training workers about the dangers and warning signs of heat stress.

Final products: Working with the union members of the Health and Safety Committee, the interns carried out a series of education sessions on heat stress during workers' lunch breaks. Pre- and post-tests documented the success of this training in both increasing knowledge about the warning signs of heat stress and behavior through increased water consumption. Water bottles and information cards summarizing the warning signs of heat stress were developed in English and Spanish and distributed to workers.

7. Chemical Plant and Refinery Safety and Overtime

Worksite sponsor: United Steelworkers Local 675

Interns: Master of Science student, Environmental Health, UCLA
Undergraduate in Environmental Health Sciences Program at California State of California University, Fresno

The union representing oil refinery workers in Los Angeles was concerned about the impact of excessive overtime on the rate of chemical releases or emergency incidents such as fires and explosions which could impact both the workers and the surrounding community. The interns began by interviewing several union members and using the information they gathered to design and conduct a survey among 79 workers. The survey covered the amount of overtime they worked, training received, health concerns, and safety issues.

Final product: the interns provided the union with a final report summarizing the findings of their survey and recommendations for improved health and safety training and staffing. The union has committed to distributing the report at bargaining unit meetings and to publish a summary in their local union newsletter. The interns also developed a 2-page fact sheet for workers titled, “What Happens When People Work Excessive Overtime?” For the community, they developed a brochure titled “The Health Effects of Working and Living Near a Refinery.”

8. Overview of Health and Safety Hazards to Carwash Workers

Worksite sponsor: United Steelworkers Union and
CLEAN: Community-Labor Environmental Action Network

Interns: Master of Science student, Social Welfare, UCLA
Undergraduate in Political Science and Urban and Regional Planning, UCLA

This project delved into a problem area identified in a previous OHIP project that looked at heat stress in six outdoor occupations in the Los Angeles area. Car wash workers were identified as being primarily Spanish-speaking immigrant workers who are exposed to heat, cleaning products, and safety hazards while receiving little or no training or personal protective equipment. While some are paid minimum wage, others are paid only by the tips they receive from customers.

The interns visited car washes, conducted “hazard mapping” sessions with car wash workers, conducted a training session on heat stress and chemical hazards, and researched the chemical ingredients of associated hazards of cleaning products and wastewater streams.

Final Product: The interns conducted a training session with the workers to share what they had learned about the specific chemical hazards and heat stress exposures among Los Angeles car washes. They provided CLEAN with a database of the chemicals typically used at the car washes, which was then used to determine appropriate training and personal protective equipment required under Cal/OSHA regulations. The coalition used this information as documentation for requesting a Cal/OSHA inspection. The interns also developed an informational pamphlet in Spanish for workers to read and understand chemical labels.

9. Taxicab Drivers and Restroom Access

Worksite sponsor: LATWA: Los Angeles Taxicab Workers Alliance

Interns: Master of Science student, Social Welfare, UCLA

Undergraduate in Political Science and Urban and Regional Planning, UCLA

The interns built on the findings of a 2006 UCLA study of Los Angeles taxi cab drivers, focusing on the health effects of limited restroom access. The UCLA study of the taxi industry in Los Angeles, “Driving Poor,” identified work-related problems among a large percentage of drivers and identified potential causes of those problems which range from 12-14 hour long days of work to harassment, violence and the poor ergonomic design of the cabs that they drive. The interns conducted a survey of over 50 drivers and used “body mapping” at a LATWA Health and Safety Committee meeting to identify health concerns.

Final product: The interns raised awareness about the need for adequate restroom facilities and the human right to use restrooms. Interns set the groundwork to set up a mobile health clinic at the LAX holding lot, which is in the works. The hope is to have the clinic functioning by the end of spring. Interns developed a report for LATWA for their upcoming 2010 City renegotiations which included recommendations to the Los Angeles Taxicab Companies, the Los Angeles, Department of Transportation, the Los Angeles Taxicab Commission, as well as LATWA.

10. Health and Safety of Hotel Housekeepers

Worksite sponsors: UNITE HERE Local 30

Interns: Master of Public Health student, San Diego State University

Master of Public Health student, University of Washington

San Diego-based interns spent the summer working with hotel room cleaners to assess workload, ergonomic risk factors, and other health and safety concerns of the predominantly immigrant Latina workforce. The interns designed a survey to document the housekeepers’ workload and

chemical exposure and administered it to 69 housekeepers at three large unionized hotels. Key issues identified in the survey were then explored in greater depth through follow-up interviews and observation of housekeepers carrying out their assigned tasks.

Final product: The interns provided the local union with a summary of the survey results which included a demographic profile, assessment of the physical workload per shift, causes of injuries sustained during work, and a list of some common cleaning agents. The union plans to use this information to propose new contract language to address the major health and safety concerns.

New York City

11. Assessment of Taxicab Design on Worker Health with the New York Taxicab Alliance (NYTWA)

Worksite sponsor: New York Taxicab Workers Alliance (NYTWA)

Interns: First year medical student, Michigan State University
Master of Public Health student, George Washington University

New York taxicab drivers are independent contractors who lease and drive taxis that are regulated by the New York Taxi-Limo Commission (TLC) using specific design criteria. In 2008 the TLC started a process to develop a new standard for taxi design. This project was intended to both document the problems with the current fleet of taxis and provide recommendations for consideration by the TLC in adopting new design standards that incorporate driver health and safety and comfort. The interns worked with the New York Taxicab Worker Alliance, a worker organization with about 11,000 members, slightly more than a quarter of the 40,000 taxicab drivers in New York City. The vast majority of drivers are recent immigrants and without health care insurance. The average taxicab worker drives about 67 hours a week.

The interns conducted initial focus groups and participated in 12-hour “drive-alongs” to gain a better understanding of the design and adjustability of the taxicabs and the general concerns of the drivers. Next, they designed a survey and conducted over 200 interviews with the drivers and summarized the results. Musculoskeletal problems were common, with over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the drivers experiencing lower back pain and about $\frac{1}{2}$ reporting foot pain.

Final product:

The students produced a report for the NYTWA summarizing their findings and providing recommendations to both the Alliance and the TLC to improve vehicle design in ways that will improve worker health and safety.

12. Overview of Health and Safety Hazards to Porters and Building Maintenance Workers

Worksite sponsor: Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Employees Union (RWDSU) Locals 88 and 670

Interns: First year medical students at CUNY Downstate (Brooklyn)
Undergraduate in Biology at CUNY State Albany

The Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU), which is affiliated with United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), represents workers throughout most of the United States and Canada. The interns were assigned to work with Locals 88 & 670 to assess the potential health and safety hazards faced by their members who work in residential and commercial buildings as porters, handymen, and maintenance workers.

The interns conducted a literature review and initial survey to gain a better understanding of the work involved in these occupations. A more detailed survey of over 60 building workers focused on lifting and musculoskeletal stressors, machine use, and chemical products used at work as well as whether employers were providing appropriate personal protective equipment and health and safety training.

Final Product:

The interns developed a health and safety pamphlet for the building workers with recommendations for safe work practices such as lifting techniques, trash handling, proper protection use for common hazardous chemicals, along with "right-to-know" laws.

