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 Newsletter

Safe Jobs Save Lives: SoCal Worker Advocates Meet with New Cal/OSHA Staff

“Cal/OSHA has issued ground-breaking citations,” stated Steven Simon of United Service Workers West, describing the agency’s inspection of an LAX contractor who violated safety standards by requiring workers to ride inadequately guarded high-lift industrial trucks. The resulting willful serious citation sends a message that employers are responsible for worker safety. “But workers are at risk when hazards are not abated,” added Veronica Alvarez of the Warehouse Workers Resource Center. And “stronger standards are needed to protect workers such as hotel housekeepers”, asserted Kurt Petersen of UNITE HERE.

They were among more than 70 worker health and safety advocates from 40 organizations who gathered at the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor on November 15 for a dialogue with Juliann Sum, Acting Chief of Cal/OSHA, and Christine Baker, Director of the California Department of Industrial Relations. Maria Elena Durazo, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the LA County Federation of Labor, addressed the group.

In 2012, two brothers were killed when they inhaled hydrogen sulfide gas while cleaning an underground storm drain system at a recycling facility near Bakersfield. The fatalities highlighted the serious dangers associated with confined space entry, which kills an average of 92 workers each year in the United States.

In response to these concerns, UCLA-LOSH developed an 8-hour course on confined space safety procedures and regulations. LOSSH staff initiated the program in November, training plumbers, electricians, maintenance staff, and health & safety personnel at the Los Angeles County/USC Medical Center.

Training consisted of classroom presentation and hands-on activities followed by a simulation exercise in a confined space at the hospital. After monitoring the atmosphere in the space to test for hazardous materials and to measure oxygen levels, each participant entered the space using supplied air breathing equipment with escape bottles, a full body safety harness, ventilation system and other safety equipment. Participants worked in pairs, with the entry person descending on a tripod and the attendant monitoring the atmosphere and operating the tripod from outside. Through hands-on practice, course participants learned the importance of preparedness and precautions and will use information in the course to enhance their confined space program.
UCLA-LOSH at the American Public Health Association Conference

On October 11, UCLA-LOSH held a ceremony at UCLA for 16 recent graduates of its Minority Worker Training Program. The program is funded by a grant from the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) with the goal of increasing the number of underrepresented minorities in the construction and environmental remediation industries, providing career opportunities in good, green, safe jobs.

Participants of the UCLA-LOSH program completed 11 weeks of pre-employment job training, consisting of literacy and life skills. They also completed courses in Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response, Lead and Asbestos Awareness, OSHA 10 Construction Safety, First Aid/CPR/AED, Green Chemistry, Environmental Justice, and Good, Green, Safe Jobs. Currently, graduates are completing job interviews with Clean Harbors, a company specializing in used oil and hazardous waste collection. The program is made possible through partnerships with Community Centers, Inc., UAW/Southeast LA WorkSource Center and LA County Probation Department.

The celebration was attended by program graduates and their families, as well as instructors and representatives from each of the partner organizations. Graduates at the event spoke to the importance of the program. “UCLA-LOSH Instructors have blessed us with the skills needed to make a difference, not just in our lives, but also in this world,” said Brent Smith. And Everardo Estrado reflected on the challenges of the rigorous training program. “No matter how hard it got, we came together and helped each other out to make sure no one was left behind. We made sure everyone had something to eat when some of us didn’t have it, it made us feel like family.”

The event ended with words of inspiration for the program graduates: “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

Minority Worker Training Program Graduation
**Students Shaping the Future of Worker Health and Safety**

As in past years, UCLA-LOSH hosted the national OHIP orientation to provide students with an overview of occupational health and safety, including common workplace hazards, participatory research in the workplace and community, adult education principles and techniques, and worksite tours. Interns presented their projects to OHIP program staff and NIOSH funders via videoconference in August, describing how workplace observations and worker interviews contributed to worker health and safety.

This summer’s program was particularly noteworthy — it marked the tenth year of OHIP student recruitment and placements. Since 2004, a total of 180 students have participated in the program, learning valuable lessons about the occupational safety and health field and contributing to groundbreaking campaigns around the country. In honor of the anniversary year, the American Public Health Association’s Occupational Health and Safety Section issued a special award to the program. OHIP co-founder Gail Bateson accepted the award and OHIP supporters celebrated the program’s past and future. The OHIS Section Social Hour featured former interns Rebecca Reindel, now with OSHA Standards and Guidance, and Duyen Tran, with the Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative in Southern California.

OHIP was featured in a recent issue of the journal, *New Solutions, A Journal of Environmental and Occupational Health Policy*. UCLA-LOSH staff members Linda Delp, Kevin Riley and Sarah Jacobs are co-authors on an article that describes the history and impact of OHIP within the larger OHS movement. Entitled “Shaping the Future: Ten Years of the Occupational Health Internship Program,” the article is available online at [http://baywood.metapress.com/link.asp?id=m2002g8w5113](http://baywood.metapress.com/link.asp?id=m2002g8w5113).

To learn more about OHIP, visit [http://aoec.org/ohip](http://aoec.org/ohip), or contact LOSH Project Coordinator/National OHIP Coordinator, Sarah Jacobs at sjacobs@irle.ucla.edu.

**New Southern California Health and Safety Specialists**

This summer and fall, UCLA-LOSH trained new worker leaders across Southern California under its 24-hour Worker Health & Safety Specialist (WOSH) course.

In August, 28 promotores de salud (health promoters) from Latino Health Access and janitorial worker-leaders from SEIU United Service Workers West in Santa Ana became WOSH Specialists, developing action plans to strengthen workplace health and safety committees. The course was organized by Kena Smith, Loss Control Representative at State Fund Insurance and current WOSH Trainer.

In October, UCLA-LOSH held a WOSH Specialist course at the Employee Rights Center in San Diego for 13 worker advocates, including members of United Taxi Drivers of San Diego, ERC staff and interns, and worker and community leaders throughout the region.

November’s course trained 20 new promotores de salud in Esperanza Housing Corporation’s health promoter training and workforce development program. They will incorporate their new occupational health and safety knowledge and skills into community outreach and education programs in Los Angeles. Two of the program graduates will work with UCLA-LOSH to educate workers at the Mexican Consulate about health and safety rights.

**Edith Hernandez interviews worker**

This summer, UCLA-LOSH sponsored six graduate and undergraduate students under the national Occupational Health Internship Program (OHIP). The interns worked in teams to investigate (1) interventions to prevent musculoskeletal injuries among hotel housekeepers (UNITE HERE), (2) workplace violence prevention among public health nurses (SEIU Local 121RN), and (3) work-related injury and illness experiences of patients accessing community health centers in South LA (Southside Coalition of Community Health Centers). They were among 22 OHIP interns nationwide.

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Partnering with Community Health Centers for Worker H&S

Workers in low-wage jobs are among the most vulnerable to work-related injuries and illness. They are concentrated in high-hazard industries with limited training and protection from workplace hazards.

Community health centers often serve as the primary source of healthcare for those workers and their families, yet many CHCs lack the capacity to diagnose, treat, advise or refer patients with work-related injuries and illness.

UCLA-LOSH is partnering with St. John’s Well Child and Family Clinic in South LA and worker centers in the area on a new Healthy Work Initiative. OHP interns in 2012 and 2013 found that providers in community clinics such as St. John’s were interested in understanding and better providing for the work-related health needs of their patients, and interviews with patients highlighted their vulnerability.

Since September, representatives of UCLA-LOSH and St. John’s have met with local worker advocates from the CLEAN Carwash campaign, the Restaurant Opportunities Center, Garment Worker Center, Black Worker Center and IDEPSCA. LOSH is also working with St. John’s staff to implement a NIOSH-funded project to capture patients’ employment information in its electronic medical records system. The information will inform St. John’s medical care services and provide valuable public health data to determine the relationship between work and health.

Few such collaborative projects with community health centers exist. A successful project can serve as an innovative model to address the needs of workers in low-wage jobs throughout the country.

LOSH Research on Office Ergonomics

This data, derived from a questionnaire survey of 2,310 LA City clerical workers, demonstrates the persistence of problems despite advances in ergonomic design, and the disparate impact on women who comprise the majority of the clerical workforce.

Research results informed an office ergonomics training program developed by UCLA-LOSH in collaboration with AFSCME Local 3090 and L.A. City. Workers were trained to identify and reduce ergonomic risk factors, with hands-on practice adjusting workstations. Research results demonstrate the need to integrate workplace improvements and health promotion activities in labor management programs that limit continuous computer work, improve the human-machine interface and reduce the sedentary nature of clerical work.

Prolonged computer use among clerical workers is associated with neck and shoulder pain, leading workers to seek medical care and file workers’ compensation claims. The association of these musculoskeletal disorders with computer use becomes stronger and includes back and wrist pain as well when workstations are not adjustable and workers have not been trained.

View the 2013 report “Dying at Work in California: The Hidden Stories Behind the Numbers”