

Workers' Guide to Health and Safety

by Todd Jailer
Miriam Lara-Meloy
and Maggie Robbins



Berkeley, California, USA

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About this book

People who work in factories making clothing, shoes, and electronics are some of the hardest working people in the world. Almost everyone on the planet depends on their labor and uses what they make. Yet many of these workers confront unhealthy, unsafe, and unfair conditions every hour of their working day.

Factory work can be designed to be healthy and safe for workers, to pay enough for workers to live with dignity and health, and to not harm people or the environment. Together with workers, organizers, occupational safety and health professionals, and employers, we have worked to describe problems, identify solutions, and find examples of organizing collaboratively and collectively to create better workplaces. This book is the result of that 10-year process.

This *Workers' Guide to Health and Safety* is easy to understand, rather than written in technical language. Anyone, no matter their educational level, expertise, or knowledge about occupational health and safety, can use this book. That is important because we believe that anyone can learn about health and safety at work, and anyone can help others learn and get organized.

This is not a textbook. It does not attempt to cover the entire body of information that is occupational health nor can it substitute for the assistance and expertise of professionals and others knowledgeable in the field. The goal of this book is to help workers gain knowledge to participate actively in creating healthier and safer workplaces. It is also a tool to encourage professionals and employers to include workers' experiences and knowledge in the creation of solutions. Without workers, change is not sustainable.

We wrote this book with the beliefs that:

- Lasting change happens when people identify the issues they think are important and acquire the tools they need to resolve them.
- Words, concepts, and illustrations that are easily understood help create knowledge and action.
- Women are a majority of the workers in export factories and their experience is the majority experience.
- Experts who pay attention to workers' needs and insights can be important allies in creating safer workplaces.
- Health and safety problems arise out of the conditions and structures of work, and solutions are found by improving them. Don't blame the workers!

We encourage you to adapt whatever you find useful in this book to best meet your needs and strengthen your efforts.





Basic occupational safety:

- Chairs, tables, tools, and workstations fit workers.
- Workers take regular breaks.
- Chemicals that harm people are not used. Workers' direct contact with chemicals is limited.
- Machines have guards to prevent injuries.
- The factory prevents fires and is prepared to fight fires.
- Noise is below 90 decibels.
- General ventilation keeps the air clean and the temperature comfortable. Local ventilation removes dust and dirty air at the source.
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) fits well, is the right kind for the danger, and is free to workers.
- Toilets are clean, and the factory provides enough clean drinking water and water for emergencies.

Organize for:

- Wages that let us live fully and well.
- Protection from harm at work – from machines, materials, or people. Justice and compensation when harm has been done.
- Work and life without violence or discrimination.
- Jobs that help create better communities, not worse ones.
- An end to pollution from factories.

Power within ourselves



Power with others



Power to take action



Advice for health promoters:

- Start with what workers know
- Work on the big problems
- Teach what is most needed
- Use words people understand
- Teach people how to learn
- Get help if needed



Advice to OSH professionals:

- Talk with and listen to workers
- Pay attention to social issues
- Share knowledge
- What is best for workers and the community should be prioritized over profits, production, and politics