Immigrant Occupational Safety Advocates Take Training Beyond the Classroom

Beyond the Classroom – A Case Study of Immigrant Safety Liaisons in Residential Construction


Key Findings

- Classroom-based health and safety information is not sufficient to build health and safety leaders. Safety liaisons receive ongoing training in leadership and organizing skills, participate in a New Labor-initiated worker council, facilitate OSHA-10 classes for their peers, and provide leadership in other public forums. These leadership roles provide opportunities for liaisons to improve communication skills, internalize a sense of authority and develop self-confidence in their ability to act.

- Linking safety and health issues with wage theft enforcement promotes worker involvement. Although working conditions are frequently dangerous, day laborers considered unpaid wages to be their most serious grievance. The hardship caused by unpaid wages promotes risky behavior; workers victimized by wage theft must accept dangerous work when offered. New Labor has some success recovering unpaid wages, which raises their profile and the workers’ own sense of agency.

- A direct relationship with OSHA has proved empowering. Use of OSHA-branded training and regular contact with OSHA staff lend credibility to liaisons’ reports of workplace hazards. OSHA’s aggressive response to complaints, when substantiated by investigation, gave liaisons confidence in their own efficacy.

- Even if workers are fully informed of workplace hazards and their legal rights, employers still possess substantial coercive power on the job. Liaisons are attempting to supplement their job site audits by recruiting small contractors to participate in safety trainings and worker council meetings.

For more information, contact:
Michele Ochsner: mochondner@work.rutgers.edu
See abstract:

©2013, CPWR – The Center for Construction Research and Training, CPWR, the research and training arm of the Building and Construction Trades Dept., AFL-CIO, is uniquely situated to serve construction workers, contractors, practitioners, and the scientific community. This card was made possible by a cooperative agreement with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, NIOSH (OH009762). The contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of NIOSH.