

## Promoting Worker Health on the Job and in the Community: A Vital Resource for Workers and Advocates

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Todd Jailer, Miriam Lara-Meloy and Maggie Robbins. (2015). *Workers' guide to health and safety*. Berkeley, CA: Hesperian. 576 pages. \$34.95 (paperback). ISBN: 978-0-942364-71-2.

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Books on occupational safety and health are frequently written in a specialized language and stake out a technical approach to the problems faced by workers in varied work environments. The genre is not, generally speaking, intended for popular consumption nor is it likely to have much immediate appeal to those whose health and safety is at issue.

The *Workers' Guide to Health and Safety*, published in 2015 by Hesperian Press, follows a different path and provides a much different product. A quick glance at the acknowledgments section in the opening pages is one clear indication that this is no dry academic text. The authors consulted contributors from the academy, to be sure, but also activists, trade unionists, community organizers, workers from the shop floor, and educators. The book draws on the experiences of factory workers and their communities around the world to provide useful tools that help organize for short- and long-term improvements in the workplace. As a result, this guide contains no shortage of critical information on workplace hazards and prevention methods, but the style is highly approachable, making this much more of a *how-to* resource than academic tome. It offers practical guidelines that will be useful to those most affected by workplace hazards, the workers themselves, as well as to educators and organizers.

The *Workers' Guide* is heavily illustrated with pictures and activities. It may be used by anyone involved in workers' health and safety—from workers to educators and organizers—to illustrate complex concepts and technical work, making it accessible to potential trainers with limited knowledge in health and safety. It provides illustrations and activities that would be helpful as teaching tools for making learning engaging and accessible to adult learners, including learners with limited literacy skills. It includes well-established activities such as body mapping and hazard mapping in addition to other activities, some of

which are novel. The guide's illustrations are organized by book chapter and can be digitally accessed for browsing, purchasing, and downloading by creating a free Hesperian Images account.

Inside the book, readers will find a wide range of topics that are relevant to workers' health and wellness, as well as occupational health and safety in the context of vulnerable working populations. In addition to addressing workplace health and safety conditions, the *Workers' Guide* places these issues in a broader perspective. The book is written in the context of vulnerability that workers usually face at work and in communities where they live. It recognizes the social and economic roots of workplace hazards and the importance of an approach to training and intervention that places workers at the center of problem solving. Attention to the broad context for work and health is perhaps most clearly captured in the section on social dangers and solutions (though, in fact, social and economic influences are underscored throughout the book).

The book opens with Part 1, a section on "Organizing for Safe and Fair Workplaces," with chapters on working for a living and living well, learning and teaching about health at work, and organizing to improve worker health. Part 2, "Industries," focuses on recognizing, evaluating, and preventing occupational hazards in the following factory settings: electronics, garment, and shoe manufacturing. Part 3, "Work Dangers and Solutions," addresses occupational hazards and strategies to reduce harmful exposures to ergonomics, chemicals, machines, electricity, fire, dust, noise, light, heat, cold, falls, falling objects, and motor vehicles.

Part 4, "Social Dangers and Solutions," includes chapters on working too much, too fast, for too little; doing factory work at home; discrimination; violence; workers who migrate; children who work; access to health care; reproductive and sexual health; stress and mental health; eating well for health; access to safe water and toilets; Human Immunodeficiency Virus; tuberculosis; a decent place to live; and pollution from factories.

Two appendices accompany the guide, "Laws and the struggle for decent, healthy and safe work" and "Common chemicals and materials," with a "Chemical Charts" section. Helpful "Resources" are listed at the end of the book. The *Workers' Guide to Health and Safety* is digitally accessible via a HealthWiki site, making the book's content available, and also providing an easily searchable appendix on chemicals information.

This guide has a global audience, including developing countries. In addition, it is widely applicable to occupational settings and conditions in the United States and Canada. Hesperian has established two "solidarity funds" to support translating the book into languages other than English and to subsidize distributing it to workers in developing countries around the world. The *Workers' Guide to Health and Safety* is currently being translated to Spanish, Vietnamese, and Bangla. Translation to Bahasa Indonesian, and Chinese will soon begin since early funds have been raised and partners have been identified.

The content and illustrations in *Workers' Guide to Health and Safety* were field-tested by 60 grassroots organizations in 25 countries (Australia, Bangladesh, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Denmark, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, Namibia, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Philippines, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and United States), and expert reviews were conducted by more than 300 individuals around the world in occupational health and safety, trade unions, universities, health clinics, labor groups, nongovernmental organizations, industry, business partnerships, among other fields. Field testing is currently being conducted for the chapter on Chemical Hazards, chemical charts, and an accompanying discussion guide that may be used in training, in Spanish with a Garment Worker Center in Los Angeles.

In sum, *Workers' Guide to Health and Safety* is a comprehensive resource on worker health and safety that embodies a community-based and popular education approach to the field. It follows a tradition that was pioneered by the seminal *Where There is No Doctor*, (*Donde No Hay Medico*), also published by Hesperian, and this new volume represents another vital resource for those seeking to incorporate participatory methods into workplace health and safety.

#### **Author Biography**

**Rania Sabty-Daily** cares to bring her expertise in bridging science, research and education to advance environmental health among disenfranchised communities and working populations. She is involved in developing occupational health training curricula, and delivering training. She also supports the work of worker centers, labor unions, environmental justice organizations, government entities and academic institutions to strengthen policy advocacy that improves working conditions for the most vulnerable. Her recent research employs community-based participatory methods to assess and address environmental hazards in community and workplace settings.

She holds a PhD in Environmental Health Sciences from the University of California, Los Angeles, and an MPH in Industrial Hygiene from the University of California, Los Angeles. She is currently Industrial Hygienist and Environmental Health Specialist at the Labor Occupational Safety and Health program at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA-LOSH), as well as, a part-time faculty member in the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health at California State University, Northridge.