

## WORKER'S GUIDE TO HEALTH AND SAFETY

BY TODD JAILER, MIRIAM LARA-MELOY,  
AND MAGGIE ROBBINS.  
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The authors have a wealth of experience in the field of health promotion with people who are facing some very difficult health, poverty and social justice issues. Not surprisingly the central theme of the book is power, the lack of it, and how workers can become empowered to protect themselves from dangers at work.

Not only the authors, but also the publisher Hesperian is committed towards working for a world in which people and communities are equipped to achieve health for all. Their mission is to provide information and educational tools that help all people take greater control over their health and work to eliminate the underlying causes of poor health.

The book is very user friendly and invites itself to be picked up and leafed through. Good for browsing and with many drawings to tell the story, it is useful for workers with various levels of reading ability in English. However it is a serious health and safety manual as demonstrated by the extensive bibliography and the coverage of some complex issues. Although the issues addressed in this manual are wide, the main target audience is workers and specifically women workers in factories that make clothing, shoes and electronics – things we use every day and don't think about the dangers and conditions facing workers making them. The book reminds us that health and safety is a global issue and somebody else is paying a price for our \$5 t-shirt.

What stands out immediately is the naming of issues as "dangers", not hazards or risks – a definition clearly and painfully understood by workers. We usually use the very narrow concept of significant hazard (or, soon, risk) and what doesn't fit within this framework is not called health and safety in some of our workplaces.

Unions have always argued that there is more to this than some employers like to acknowledge. Essentially it is about decent, healthy, fair and – dare I say it? – comfortable work.

Dangers and solutions – this is useful language for workers that they can relate to which doesn't create technical barriers and myths around health and safety.

The issues faced and stories told are sobering; apart from familiar topics like ergonomic and chemical issues they also include descriptions of social dangers, and those facing women and children are very concerning.

Overwork, stress, harassment, work speed, safe water and toilets, sexual violence: they all have a big impact on (not only) workers' health.

In reading some of those worker's experiences we could easily dismiss them as Third World problems, but some of the issues are very familiar to our union. New Zealand workers also have to organise to gain the power that will improve their health and safety.

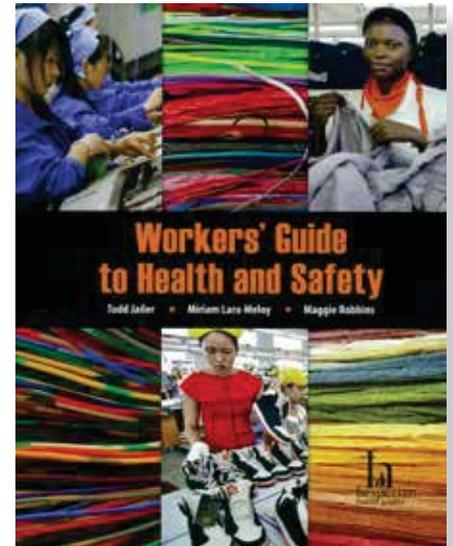
Many chapters should be of interest to workers here, and to those working in educating workers for H&S. We here in

Aotearoa/NZ should also be mindful of issues that don't fit the narrow definition of health and safety.

What can workers do? Knowledge is power and this book is full of information about problem definition and presenting and developing solutions. Good solutions are often not easy to get agreement on, especially in disputes like ventilation system vs respirator. This is where unions can "encourage" bosses to do the right thing.

A number of chapters are available online. Check it out, and see if you think your co-workers might find it of use.

*Reviewed by Fritz Drissner, health and safety coordinator, EPMU*



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