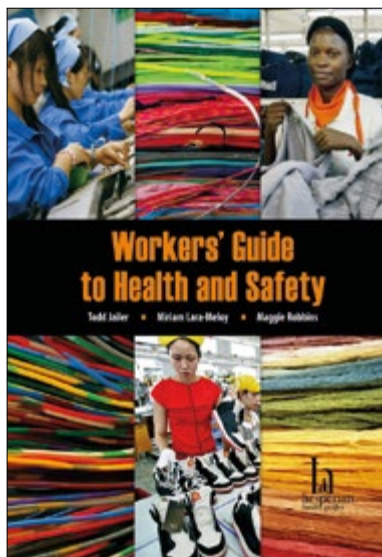


## WORKERS' RESOURCE



**W**orkplace disasters, from the Ali Enterprises garment factory in Karachi, Pakistan, to the Rana Plaza building collapse in Savar, Bangladesh, should remind us that our clothes, shoes, and electronics might well be cheap for us but come at much too high a price to those who manufacture them.

The *Workers' guide to health and safety* aims to provide essential information to those who are the best placed and the most highly motivated to prevent the devastating factory disasters that all too often dominate the news – the workers themselves.

It puts occupational safety and health information into a form that can be used by those most affected by workplace hazards. From low wages to sexual harassment, from ergonomics to fire safety, and from chemical exposure at work to pollution outside the plant, this book draws on the experiences of factory workers, their advocates and their communities around the world in order to provide tools to help workers organise for short- and long-term improvements.

The contents include advice on how to recognise workplace dangers; how to be a workers' health promoter; how to fight violence, gender discrimination, abuse of migrant workers and low wages; and work-related information on first aid, nutrition, mental health, and avoiding diseases such as HIV and TB.

The book also includes an extensive chemical index, presenting complex chemical information in a manner that is easy to understand so that workers can identify chemicals with which they may be working

and understand their short-term and chronic health effects. It then proposes various ways in which workers can be protected, such as by substituting safer chemicals, improving ventilation and using the right personal protective equipment (PPE).

The book has 33 chapters, divided into four parts. The first part, **Organizing for safe and fair workplaces** sets the scene by addressing the questions of: Working for a living and living well; Learning and teaching about health at work; and Organizing to improve worker health.

The authors point out that while brands like Apple, Adidas and Gap tell the factories exactly what they want them to produce, they do not build or run any of the workplaces themselves and do not take responsibility for the working conditions or pay agreements of the workers.

However, because the various brands' orders are so large, they can dictate the terms of the contract and will negotiate as low a price as possible. Inevitably individual suppliers will pare their costs to the bone with workers bearing the brunt in low wages and poor working conditions.

Part 2, **Industries** is devoted to three specific types of workplace – electronics factories, garment factories and shoe factories – since these are the predominant industries across the world where workers do not enjoy the health and safety rights and opportunities for organised labour as in the EU and North America, for example. The authors are thus speaking directly to their target audience.

Part 3, **Work dangers and solutions** has chapters devoted to ergonomics, chemical dangers, machine injuries, electricity, fire, dust, noise, light, heat and cold, falling workers, falling objects and vehicle injuries, ventilation and PPE.

All these chapters (and, indeed, all the chapters in the book) are illustrated with simple yet effective diagrams and line drawings to underline exactly what is being said in the text.

Part 4, **Social dangers and solutions** is a welcome addition since often such topics do not make it into similar texts. For instance, *Doing factory work at home* explains that many women work at home, making clothes, for example, because their husbands do not want them to go out to work or because they need to care for children – though they still need to earn money.

What happens, though, is that homeworkers end up working far more hours for less money than their counterparts in the factories and often end up involving their children

in the work too. (There's a separate chapter called *Children who work* in this part).

The authors also point out that work dangers are worse at home – in the case of fire or a chemical spillage or stress, for instance.

Other chapters in Part 4 include: Discrimination; Violence; Workers who migrate; Access to health care; Reproductive and sexual health; Stress and mental health; Eating well for health; Access to safe water and toilets; HIV and TB; Decent housing; and Pollution from factories.

Two appendices – *Laws and the struggle for decent, healthy, and fair work* (which concentrates on international bodies such as the UN and the International Labour Organization) and *Common chemicals and materials* complete the book.

This is a book crammed with useful, sensible information and it is to be hoped that it finds its way to the audience it is addressing. However, many trade unionists in this country could find it a source of inspiration. But those who need to read it most are those who run the global brands and ultimately could do so much to ensure that the people who work for them (though not employed by them) can work in safety and receive decent rewards for their efforts.

**Workers' guide to health and safety.** Todd Jailer, Miriam Lara-Meloy and Maggie Robbins. Hesperian ISBN 978-0-942364-71-2. £23 <http://store.hesperian.org/>

## CONSTRUCTION SAFETY

**A**lthough the construction and engineering sector makes an important contribution to the economic, social, and environmental objectives of a nation, it has a justifiably notorious reputation for being an unsafe industry in which to work. Despite the fact that safety performance in the industry has improved across the developed world, injuries and fatalities still occur with sickening frequency.

This is as true for the UK as it is in Australia, where both the authors of this book work – Professor Zou at Swinburne University of Technology and Dr Sunindijo at the University of New South Wales.

In order for change to occur, the authors say that the industry needs to integrate safety into all decision-making processes, and in this book they take a broad view of safety from a strategic decision-making and