

3 Organizing to improve worker health



Because problems in the workplace affect many people, often the best way to resolve them is to involve many people. A worker health promoter needs to be able to help other workers get involved, learn, and organize around health at work. Bringing a group together and keeping people motivated to improve worker health is one of the most important things you can do. It takes time and patience to encourage people to participate and keep them involved.

This chapter includes activities to help you bring people into a group to work together, identify and learn more about problems, and educate and convince your co-workers about short-term and long-term ways to improve the workplace. It also shows how forming health and safety committees can help workers, OSH professionals, and employers to make these needed changes happen more smoothly.

When choosing an activity, think about:

- Which activity is best for the kind of information you want to gather now?
- Which activity do you and your co-workers have time for?
- Which activity will create a network for communication among co-workers? Which will increase cooperation with others, including management, OSH professionals, and neighbors?
- Which activity will get workers excited about organizing for change?

What these activities can help you learn

No matter which activity you choose, the information you collect from workers through holding discussions, doing surveys, drawing maps, and comparing notebooks will be different from factory to factory. But to help identify common problems and work on successful solutions, you should always be looking to answer questions like these:

- What problems do all or most workers share?
- Do men and women mention different problems?
- Which health problems happen regularly? Which happen occasionally?
- Which problems are the most serious or can be the most harmful?
- Which problems will most workers be excited to fix?
- Which problems will most interest leaders in the community?
- Which problems can be solved quickly and easily?

Share what you learn

Share the information you collect with other workers, especially those who shared their ideas and concerns with you. Talking with your co-workers helps to keep them involved, builds support for changes, and interests them in making more changes in the future. For the same reasons, share information with allies in the community such as church groups, women's groups, or neighborhood organizations.



Talk with workers about their concerns

Find ways to talk to workers about the work conditions that bother them and that they think are important. These discussions let you “take the temperature” of the factory and learn how people feel about organizing to change conditions. It also gives your co-workers a chance to know and trust you, and to begin to build power within the workforce.

Reach out to people in your factory in informal ways at first. It might be safer and easier to talk to people outside work. Be clear and open about why you are asking questions and what you plan to do with their answers. Do not force anyone to share information if they do not feel comfortable. Be discreet when approaching people, especially in public.

When you are ready to hold a meeting, identify a small group of interested and trustworthy people in your factory. Invite them to meet at a location outside work. Meeting in small groups is best at first. Small groups can be especially useful if workers come from different cultural, language, ethnic, or immigrant groups. It may also be useful to gather men and women separately at first, so women feel free to voice their concerns. Over time, groups can develop enough trust to include workers from all backgrounds.

During conversations with workers, create lots of space and time to let people talk about what bothers them and what issues they think are important. Be tolerant of people who do not want to talk or organize, and do not discriminate against them for not participating. Some people need more time to make up their minds.

Some issues people raise might make you feel uncomfortable. Try your best to be open to their concerns and look for others to help you think through how to respond. Remember, your role is not to help solve every problem, but to help people think and find tools to solve problems themselves.

If you ask about health at work, expect people to want to talk about their whole health – health does not clock in and out of work!



Activity

Talk in small groups



One or two people can lead several small groups, or you can have several people lead one or two small groups each. This allows more people to develop leadership and lets you gather more information in less time.

Meet: Call a few workers together in a place where you all feel comfortable talking about work problems. Find a safe space that is easy to get to.

Talk about concerns: Ask what bothers people at work or mention a concern you have. Find out what conditions they think harms or might harm them.

Listen for problems and proposed solutions: Listen carefully to each person's concerns as well as for problems many workers share. Find out if different concerns affect different groups of workers. Pay special attention to the ideas of women and others from groups who are often discriminated against, such as migrant workers or people with disabilities.

Write what you learn: To help remember everything, take notes during the discussion or write your thoughts down immediately afterwards.

Summarize the results: After speaking with many workers, summarize what you have learned by answering questions such as: Which problems are common to many workers? Which problems do workers feel are the most important? Which ones have the easiest solutions?

Do you need help? OSH professionals, unions, NGOs, and others may have helpful skills and experience. Ask the group who might approach them.

Ask questions through surveys

Carrying out a survey helps you gather similar information from many people, so the answers are easier to compare. A survey can also build a relationship among the team carrying out the survey, and between each team member and the co-workers they talk with.

Surveys are less useful for collecting complex information. Those issues may be best talked about in a group where everyone participates. Topics about feelings or issues people are uncomfortable with may be best collected with one-on-one survey questions.



Tell people who you are, why you are doing the survey, and how sharing their experiences will help improve workers' lives.

Ask specific questions, for example, how many hours a person worked the past week, if people have skin rashes, or if a supervisor limits time at the toilet.

The simplest, easiest method of gathering information is always the best. If you have only a few, very simple questions, you might be able to just ask for a show of hands in the cafeteria and not need to do a survey.

Surveys with many complicated questions can be difficult to carry out and to analyze. People often want to talk about more issues than can be included in a survey. Plan to listen to people's opinions about various things, note them down, and then invite them to meetings or discussions where they can follow up on their concerns.

Keeping information private is important when doing a survey. It will protect you and the people you are surveying.



Activity

Do a survey

Meet: Ask several co-workers to help you. Meet in a place where you all feel comfortable talking about work problems.

Talk about concerns: Work with this team to make a list of questions to ask your co-workers. Start with the issues at work the group is most concerned about. From this list, choose a few common dangers or the issues you think are the most important to find out.

Write survey questions: Create a list of questions. When you ask about a specific problem at work, always ask how important that problem is to them and how much they care about improving it. If you have too many questions, think about which are most important. Questions with yes/no or multiple-choice answers are easier to summarize than open-ended questions. Do not make the options too limiting so you can find out what people really think. Try the survey first with a few co-workers who did not work on the questions. If they find the questions unclear or think there are too many, rewrite the questions and shorten the survey.

In the last month, have you had:
 Rashes: Yes/No
 Cuts: Yes/No
 Pain: Yes/No
 Breathing problems: Yes/No

Plan the survey: Decide how many workers each of you will survey and from which parts of the factory. Set a date for the team to meet and check on progress. Use role playing and other activities to prepare the team for all the things that could happen during the survey. Also plan what you might do after the survey to see if the questions will generate the information you will need.

Do the survey: As some workers may not read well, you might decide to ask the questions in person and write down the answers.

Check in with each other: When the team meets again, have each person talk about the funniest or most interesting person they surveyed, and the most difficult ones. If some team members are having difficulties, ask other members to share some of the ways they found to make surveying easier.

Summarize the results: When you have enough information, add up all the answers and categorize them. Then summarize what the team has learned by answering questions such as: What are the most common dangers people have observed or experienced? Which dangers are felt by only one group of workers? What health problems related to work are people experiencing? What do people seem to care about most? What are they willing to work to change?

Listen to what workers know

A group of us took a workshop on ergonomics. We learned how work can be designed in a way that hurts less. If we put things we need often closer to us, we reduce how much our bodies must move, which makes them hurt less later. We also learned to stretch, massage, and exercise our bodies to keep them healthy.

When the trainer talked about injuries caused by repeating the same movements over and over, we knew what she was talking about. Many of us have hand pain because of that! So when we went back to work and talked about “repetitive strain injuries,” we thought people would be interested. Instead, people told us, “You are wrong! What we have is arthritis, not this repetitive strain nonsense. You get arthritis as you work more and get older, and nothing can fix that.”

At the next workshop, we complained about our hard-headed co-workers in the factory. The trainer explained that every person has lots of ideas about health. Our role is to value people’s ideas and then introduce new ones. If we tell people they are wrong, they probably will just stop listening. We have to find ways to help people understand new ideas, and show how a new idea is related to what people already know.

Instead of saying they were wrong about arthritis, she suggested we ask questions, such as: Where does it hurt? Do you feel tingling, tiredness, and other sensations besides pain? Does it hurt more after work?

The questions let people bring themselves to an understanding of the differences between arthritis and strain injuries. And since they got there themselves, people were willing to accept the new information.

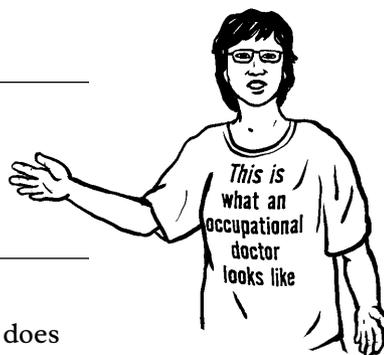
The trainer also said we could invite people to test the new ideas and see what happens. Ask some people to try to lessen their pain through small changes at their workstations, or to stretch with you during breaks, and you can show that the ideas work. After a week or so, ask them if they feel any better.

We followed her advice, and our co-workers started to learn how work was making their bodies hurt and that they could do something about it besides suffering the pain. But we learned a bigger lesson: when we help people understand instead of just telling them, we get better results and build a stronger, more active group.

Share experiences with mapping activities

Group activities that invite people to share their experiences and observations about their bodies, their work, and their communities are an opportunity to build upon people's knowledge and to create a shared understanding of work problems. Mapping activities also let workers see how common many of their problems are. This helps a group more easily agree on solutions and priorities for taking action.

Nobody knows workers' bodies or workplaces better than they do. By letting workers show where in the body they have pain, they can help us pinpoint the areas where improvements have to happen so we can help reduce their pain.



Map of the body: This map lets you ask, “Where does work hurt your body?” Everyone in the factory can contribute to this kind of map. A good way to start is for you to talk about where you feel body pain. That will help others feel comfortable talking about themselves and their problems at work. See an example of a map of the body on page 160.

Map of your factory: With workers comfortable talking about problems at work, make a workplace map. Label where the processes, jobs, or areas are that can harm workers, including harmful people, such as a rude supervisor. Also mark where accidents have happened. The workplace map focuses the group on specific problems in specific places in the factory. Then you can talk about specific solutions for them. See an example of a workplace map on page 253.

Map of the community: After doing the Pollution walk activity on page 443, bring together a group to map out the routes in which the problems inside the factory spill out into the community. You can map pollution by looking at where the waste goes after it leaves the factory and the health problems it causes. Showing the links between the factory and the community can help persuade neighbors and community groups to support workers' campaigns to improve factory conditions and to convince unions to support environmental causes.

Activity

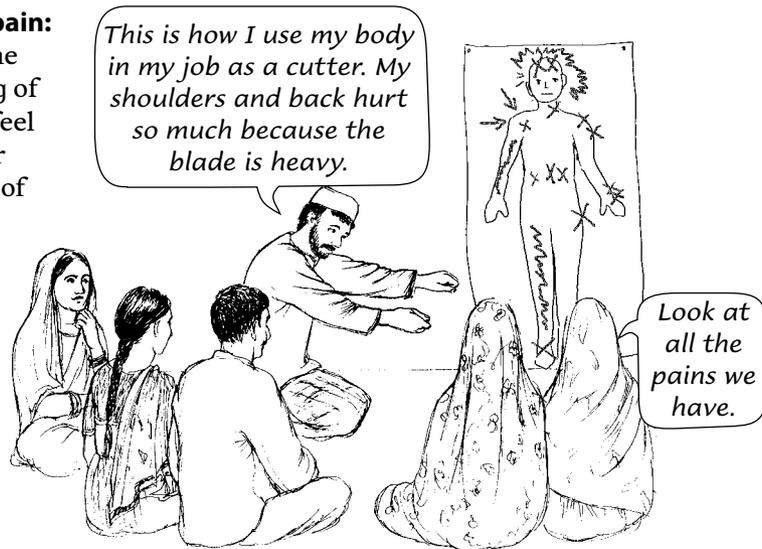
Draw a map of the body

Meet: Gather a group of co-workers and have something to draw on that everyone can see. A large piece of paper and a marking pen, a chalkboard and chalk, or a smooth area of soft soil and pebbles or nuts would each work.

Draw an outline for the map: Draw the outline of a human body on the paper, chalkboard, or earth.

Mark and talk about pain:

Ask people to mark the places on the drawing of the body where they feel pain from work. After people mark the map of the body, ask them to explain why they put the mark where they did. What pain do they have? What work tasks cause this pain? What dangers cause this pain? After each person does this, ask who else has the same pains.



Discuss dangers and solutions: After everyone has spoken, discuss which dangers affect the most people, which dangers are the most serious, which might be easiest to fix, and then which the group thinks should be fixed first. Ask for ideas on how to fix these problems.

Write what you learn: Take notes about the pains people describe, the dangers that cause the pain, and the solutions they propose. Write them in a place where others can see them and add to or change them.

Options: If you have several colors of marking pens, use different colors for different kinds of problems. For example, you might decide that ergonomic problems will be red and problems caused by chemicals will be blue. Or, have the workers from each work area use the same color to see if they share problems. Using colors might also let you see if one kind of problem is more common than another. You could also use “ouch” stickers on the map to show where there is pain.

Activity

Draw a map of your factory



Meet: Gather in a place where all feel comfortable talking about dangers at work. Lay a large piece of paper and marking pens in several colors on a table (or use a chalkboard and chalk).

Divide large groups: Divide into small groups so each can create and discuss their own map. Each group can explain their map to the others as a way to share different views of the same workplace.

Draw an outline of your factory: Ask the group to draw it as if they were looking down through the roof of the building from the sky. Each floor of the factory will need its own map. Include the walls, doors, windows, and exits. Draw in the work areas, workstations, machines, people (supervisors and co-workers), or anything else the group wants to include.

Mark and talk about dangers: Ask the group to mark the areas on this map where they have experienced or seen dangers. Use different colors. For example, use red to mark physical dangers such as fire, electrical wires, slippery floors, bad stairs, and so forth. Use blue to mark where chemicals are used or dust is created. Use orange where jobs cause strain, sprain or overuse of workers' bodies. Use yellow for biological dangers such as contaminated food and water, or dirty bathrooms. Use green where workers feel stress from threats, harassment, and unfair treatment.

Take one more look: Have the group look over the map and ask if any important dangers are missing. Add them to the map with words, colors, or a drawing. Also ask if anyone has lost their job or gone on sick leave because of work problems, and add them to the map where they used to work.

Summarize the dangers: Help summarize the dangers with questions: Which dangers are common to many workers? Which dangers are felt by only one group of workers? Which dangers cause the most serious problems?

Activity

Draw a map of your community

Bring paper and pencils, pens, or markers to draw the map. Or use stones, sticks, and other materials to make a map on the ground.

Meet: Invite workers and community members to do the Community pollution survey on page 443 where people survey community members, walk through the community, and take photographs. All of this can be used to make a map.

Draw a map: Ask people to draw a map of the community that shows the factories and the areas where people live, go to school, buy their food, and spend time. Be sure to include community water sources, bodies of water, food growing areas, and waste dumps. The size of the area represented by the map can be as large or as small as makes sense for your situation.

Mark causes and effects of pollution: Use a different color (or material) to show each kind of pollution. Show where it starts, how it moves through the community, and how it affects people's health.

- **Where pollution starts:** Are the factories in your community polluting the air, water, and land? Which ones are polluting? What does pollution look like? Mark where and how it comes out of the factory. Some kinds of pollution are not as visible as others.
- **Signs of pollution:** Where does the waste go? Are waste and chemicals dumped into the water? Can you see or smell smoke or chemicals in the air? Do people and animals in the community come in contact with factory waste? Ask people to talk about all kinds of pollution and the ways we interact with it. Be sure to include the people in your community who collect, clean up, or recycle waste.
- **People who are sick:** Mark areas where people complained about health problems such as rashes, asthma, reproductive health problems, children born with birth defects, and cancers, because these are some of the health problems caused by pollution that your survey might uncover. Look to see if a problem “clusters” in a specific area. Often you will find clusters in the communities closest to the factory. But if the factories dump chemicals or other wastes into a river, communities downstream are likely to have similar clusters.

(continued)

Activity

Draw a map of your community *(continued)*

The blue water from the factory goes into the river here.



People who live here said they had lots of rashes and skin problems.

Take one more look: Have the group look over the map and ask if any important information is missing. For example, people might want to add areas where materials get recycled in your community and talk about pollution there, too. Or talk about other important polluters in your community.

Document and summarize what you learned: If your map is on paper, take it with you. If it is drawn on the ground, take photos of it. Discuss how you will share it and its information with other workers, people in your community, government officials responsible for environmental and public health, and with social media or other kinds of media. Getting people to pay attention to the problems outside of the factory that are caused by the factory can help you bring their attention to the problems inside the factory and get support to improve them.

Keep information about work and health

Many countries have laws that require the factory to keep records about accidents and workers' health problems. These records can help you determine the most dangerous areas of your factory, whether workers from one part of the factory are getting the same illnesses, and what type of accidents happen most often. This can help you work with the factory management to lower the number of illnesses and injuries in the plant. Ask your employer to share this information with you.

Many employers will not share this information. In any case, it is a good idea to keep your own records and show other workers how to do the same. One important thing about keeping your own health notebook is that you can take it with you from one job to another. You will not lose the record of your exposures to chemicals or how many days of serious headaches you have had just because you change factories.



Keep a notebook

Keep a record of your own work and health history, including details about working conditions, chemicals used, and signs of health problems, especially when you are starting a new job. Pictures and videos of your workplace or of a rash on your body, for example, can be helpful too. This information can help a doctor find out what is happening to you. It is useful for lawyers, OSH professionals, union organizers, journalists, and others helping you. Keeping a notebook will help you understand your own body and work conditions better.



You will see this symbol throughout the book to remind you to write work dangers and health problems in your notebook.

Your health: Keep a simple daily record of your health. At first it might be easier to write only what hurts or makes you feel sick, such as when you have a fever or a rash. But if you write something every day, you will begin to notice more about how your body feels and changes from day to day. Record information about headaches, dizziness, rashes, and breathing problems, which are problems often connected to chemicals. Include health problems that may not be related to your work as well. And if you have medical test results, save a copy, take a photo of it, or write down as much as you can remember about it.

Your jobs and employers: Every time you start a new job, write down as much information as possible about your employer. Include the name of the company, the exact address (take a picture if you can), and the names of your bosses and supervisors. If the company is sold or you get a new boss, update that information in your notebook. Also note trainings, medical checks, or certifications you received while working there. Note when chemicals are changed and new chemicals are added in your work process.

Review your notebook with other workers: Review what you have noticed about your own health and problems at work with others who may also keep notebooks. Look for common problems around common dates. What might have caused them? If you find that a change in cleaning chemicals gave everyone a headache, for instance, that can give you more reason to suggest to your boss that he find a safer and better cleaner. Sometimes a health and safety committee will collect information into a combined notebook for a work area or an entire factory.

Help measure dangers at work

You can help safety and health professionals in your factory by monitoring and measuring dangers. This is a good activity for small groups of workers in the same work area because it helps workers come up with solutions and tracks whether changes solve the problems or not.

Some dangers can only be measured by using special equipment or tests, for example, measuring how much of a chemical is in the air you breathe (see Testing for chemicals on page 156). But you can take a lot of measurements with just your senses.

These are some of the dangers you can help measure and some ways you can measure them:

- **Ergonomics:** Count how many hand movements you make for each part and how many parts you produce each hour, shift, or day.
- **Heat and cold:** Measure how hot or cold the air is with a thermometer.
- **Fire:** Count how many fire exit doors are in your factory and how many exit doors are locked during the work shift. (None should be locked!)
- **Discrimination:** Compare the pay of men and women workers.
- **Violence:** Count how many workers have been threatened or hit by the supervisor.
- **Access to toilets:** Count how many toilets there are in the factory, how many are unlocked, and how many are clean.



Write in your notebook any accidents at work, for example, a chemical spill or any situation that puts workers in danger. Count how many times these happen in a month, and in which areas of the factory. This will allow you to measure how dangerous an area or time period is. Write down date and time, exactly what happened, if people were injured, if police, inspectors, or ambulances were called, and any other information that might be helpful.

Organize a health and safety committee

Setting up a health and safety committee in your factory can help workers address health and safety problems and win changes. Health and safety committees can be formed in workplaces that have unions or in workplaces that lack unions. Health and safety committees usually include equal numbers of workers and management. Their job is to identify dangers, tell workers about the dangers, propose solutions to the dangers, monitor how the problems are fixed and that they stay fixed, and encourage workers to be active in their own health and safety.

Health and safety committees work well when they:

- include workers who represent the interests of the workers.
- hold elections to choose the worker representatives.
- allow workers to say what they think without fear of punishment.
- initiate changes and see them through.
- have procedures to confront dangerous problems that are not fixed.

Having a health and safety committee in your factory might be required by law. Ask a union or a lawyer about your country's labor code. If a health and safety committee is not required, try to convince your boss that a committee would allow him to find factory problems before they become dangerous to workers and expensive to fix. A committee can also help the factory win more contracts by preparing for audits and ensuring the work is safe. One limitation of health and safety committees is they tend to ignore many labor issues. For example, getting paid enough and on time, as well as limiting the number of working hours and shift work, contribute to workers' health and well-being, but health and safety committees usually do not cover these issues.

You can also organize a health and safety committee with workers only. If you cannot hold an election, look for workers who you know are responsible and committed to improving work. Informal committee meetings, without management, can allow safety committee members to discuss issues and decide how to share information with other workers. They can also help you stand up more powerfully to the boss. For example, your committee can collect all the Safety Data Sheets (SDS) for the chemicals used and then organize a training to help everyone understand them. A formal health and safety committee can do this, too. You do not need a lot of people – you just need a strong group of involved people who want to keep other workers informed and involved.

Organizing unions in export factories

When organized in unions, workers have safer workplaces, better working conditions, higher pay, and more power on the job. It is legal to organize unions in most countries, but sometimes in special export processing zones union organizing is illegal. Even where it is legal, government officials may not be willing or able to enforce labor laws and protect workers who are organizing. And when workers do succeed in forming a union, sometimes the employer refuses to recognize it or to negotiate a contract.

These are difficult conditions for organizing, but democratic, honest unions are still the best solution workers have found to improve their work and their lives. As workers gain more experience in organizing changes in the workplace, their unionizing campaigns tend to be more successful. As in struggles for health and safety, the key to effective organizing is listening to what your co-workers want to see changed, and encouraging their participation in making that change happen. Each organizing victory inspires the next campaign in your factory or a factory down the road or across the ocean.

Forming a union despite company opposition

Workers at the Yoo Yang garment factory in Honduras were tired of harassment, low pay, and bad working conditions. They decided to form a union, inspired by workers in a factory nearby who won the struggle to have their union recognized. For a year, the workers pushed for recognition from the government and a contract with the factory. They pressured their boss to listen to them through creative actions such as boycotting the cafeteria and taping blue solidarity ribbons on all their machines. After lunch, they marched back into the factory together. They held 5-minute work stoppages.

The workers were harassed. Some were fired illegally and the factory threatened to close, but the union stayed strong and won a contract. The owners agreed to pay higher wages, increase benefits, and meet with a workers' health and safety committee every month. It was a big win. Then the union began supporting workers in another Yoo Yang-owned factory who formed a union. They too were working to gain recognition, win a contract, and to stop the intimidation of union supporters. When workers from the 2 factories got together to share their experiences, it helped a lot.

The right to organize and form a union



The **ILO Core Labor Standards** (see page 454) are considered to establish fundamental labor rights internationally. They include the Elimination of Forced Labor, the Abolition of Child Labor, the Elimination of Discrimination in the Workplace, and the Right to Organise and Form Unions. These conventions specifically address the right to organise unions:

The **ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (No. 87)** says:

- Workers and employers have a right to organize and join organizations.
- Workers' and employers' organizations have a right to draft their own constitutions and rules, elect representatives in full freedom, and organize activities and programs.
- The government should not prevent workers from exercising their right to organize.
- Workers' and employers' organizations have a right to join federations and confederations, as well as to affiliate with international organizations.
- Workers' and employers' organizations should be protected from suspension or dissolution.

The **ILO Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention (No. 98)** protects against acts of anti-union discrimination in employment. Workers are protected from:

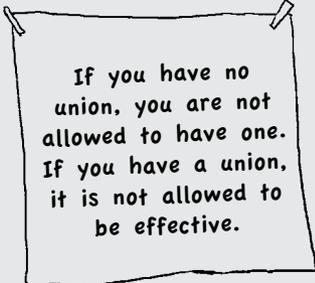
- employment conditions that force workers to give up union membership or that prohibit them from joining a union.
- dismissal due to union membership or participation in union activities.

The roles of the UN, ILO, and other international organizations that promote workers' rights are explained in Appendix A.

A union struggles to raise health issues

From its very beginnings, the electronics industry has tried to stop workers from organizing. The industry saw demands for fair wages, good working conditions, and safe workplaces as a challenge to their control and to their profits. They claim, “Remaining non-union is essential to the survival of our companies.”

But inside the Special Economic Zone in Southern Luzon, the Philippines, the NXP Workers’ Union has been organizing workers for more than 20 years. Management has fired union leaders and clamped down on workers who fought for better wages and hours. By promoting union democracy and continuing their union-building efforts, NXP has remained strong in the face of these attacks and won many campaigns.



If you have no union, you are not allowed to have one. If you have a union, it is not allowed to be effective.

While wages and conditions have improved, occupational safety and health has not. Many workers still believe electronic companies are safe places to work. Although NXP has carried out research to understand which workers are getting sick and why, safer and healthier work at NXP is still a challenge. The company still uses banned and dangerous chemicals, such as tetrachloroethylene (PERC) and trichloroethylene

When life is so hard, it's difficult to convince workers that their health is the most important thing. More important than money.



(TCE). Many workers suffer from hearing loss, but the NXP cannot get the company to reduce noise levels by installing quieter machines. Although the union tries to motivate workers to become active around occupational health, not enough workers respond.

But the NXP union is nothing if not stubborn. The union leadership was arrested and fired for protesting factory conditions. With strong support from the union members, after 5 months most got their jobs back, and their demands were accepted by the company. Now the leadership is trying to convince the workers to struggle just as hard for health and safety.

Plan campaigns around the most important problems

Gathering information about problems at work gets people talking and feeling connected. For many workers, those discussions will be the first time they feel their concerns about work are being heard. It can be a powerful experience to learn that others share similar problems.

When workers know and trust their co-workers, it becomes possible to begin talking about what they want to change. First they identify the problems and then they plan the solutions. Even when different groups of workers share similar problems, each group may support a different solution that they think best fits their situation.



Make your voices heard!

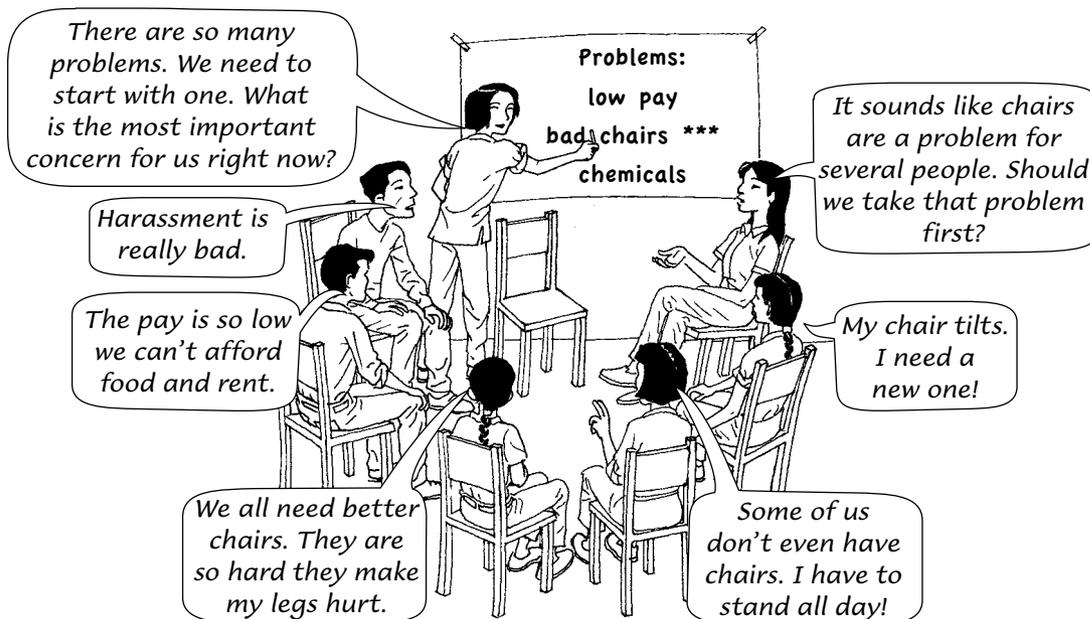
Step 1: Choose a problem

Although many changes are probably needed, your group may be more effective if it works on one at a time. First, pick a problem the group has a good chance of solving quickly. As the group learns to work together, you can take on more difficult problems. If you choose several problems at once, it usually requires a stronger group and a more complex campaign.

To help a group decide what problems to tackle first, it may be helpful to discuss questions such as:

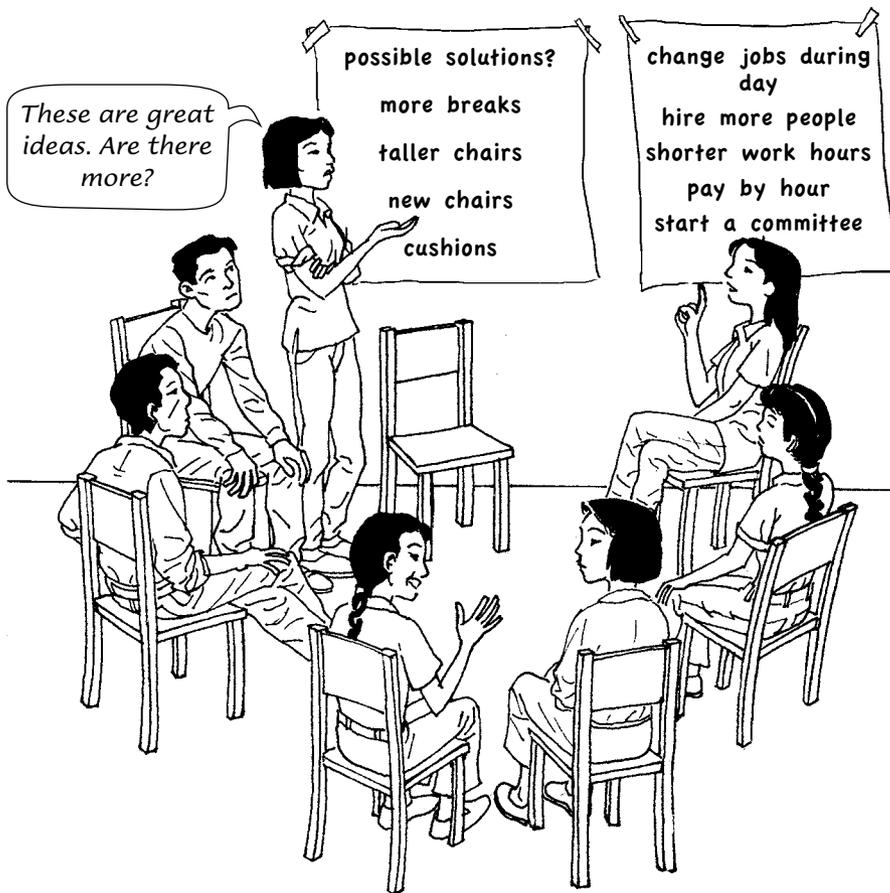
- Which dangers affect the most workers?
- Which danger causes the most serious harm or is the most dangerous?
- Which dangers can be solved quickly?
- What will get strong support from co-workers?
- Which community groups, politicians, or community leaders can give support?
- Which local media — radio, newspapers, or TV stations — might give support?
- Is the company violating any laws?
- Are there international groups that can help?

You may need more information before deciding on a problem and going on to Step 2. See pages 31 to 32.



Step 2: Decide how to solve the problem

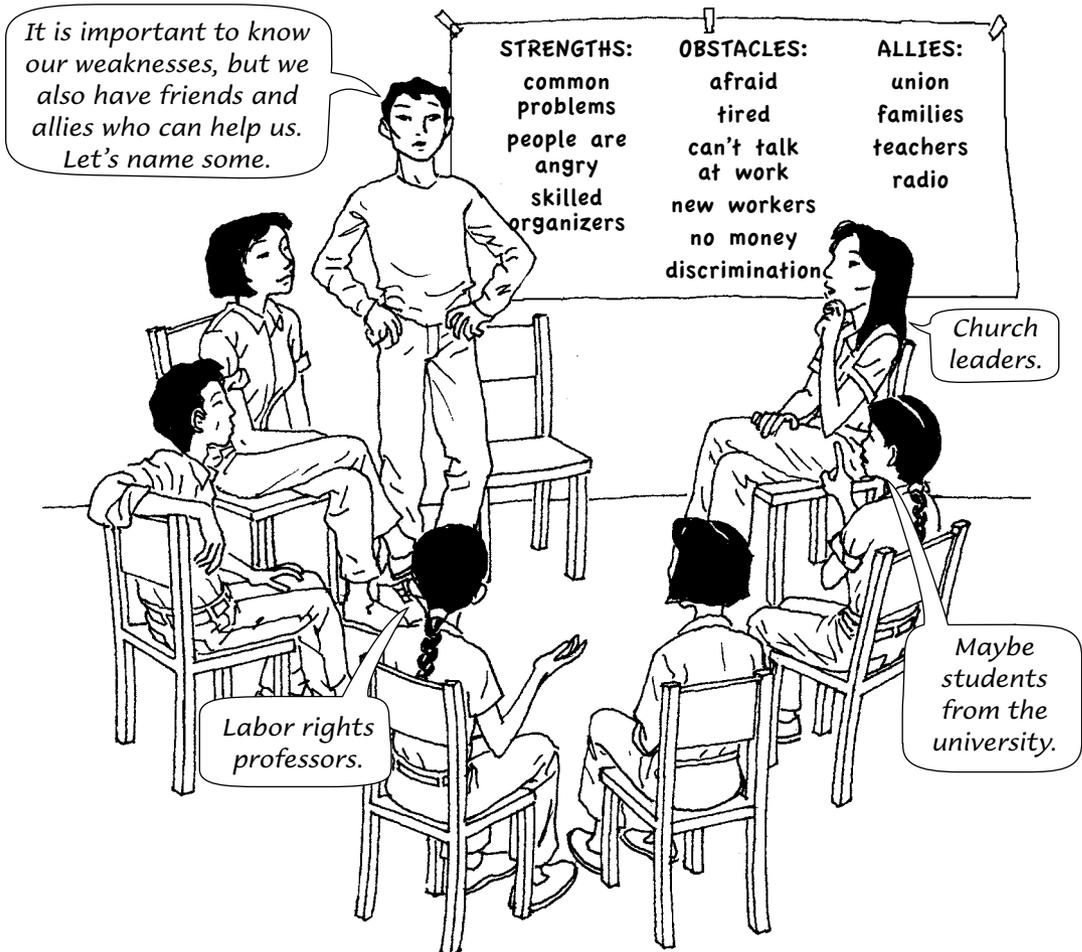
List all the ways the problem could be solved. Use the illustration from “Solve health and safety problems” on pages 8 to 9 to talk about the changes that could be made. But do not limit the group to those answers. Be open to any ideas about how to solve problems – ideas that come directly from the workers are more likely to be appropriate for their factory. Think about changes and solutions as steps in a ladder. The first step is the easiest change, and keep moving up towards more permanent, long-term solutions. Pick ways that best use your group’s strengths and resources.



Step 3: Look at your strengths, obstacles, and allies

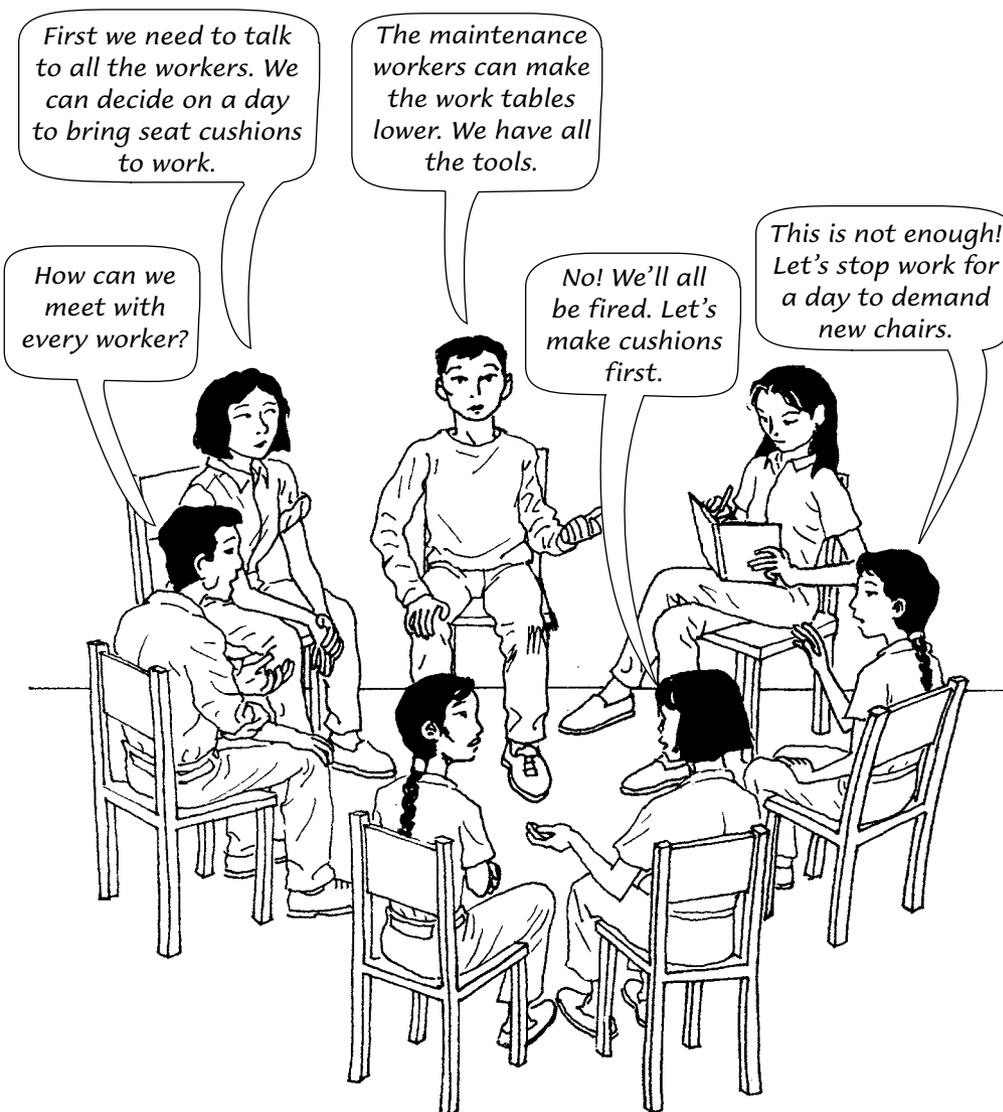
In addition to the strength of working together, what other strengths do workers have that they can use to solve these problems? Talk about and write down:

- What are our strengths? What opportunities for change do we see? What strategies would be most useful to pressure the employer to make changes?
- What are the obstacles we will have to overcome? What concerns do workers have about organizing? What allies does the employer have to resist workers' demands?
- What allies could we enlist to help pressure the employer?



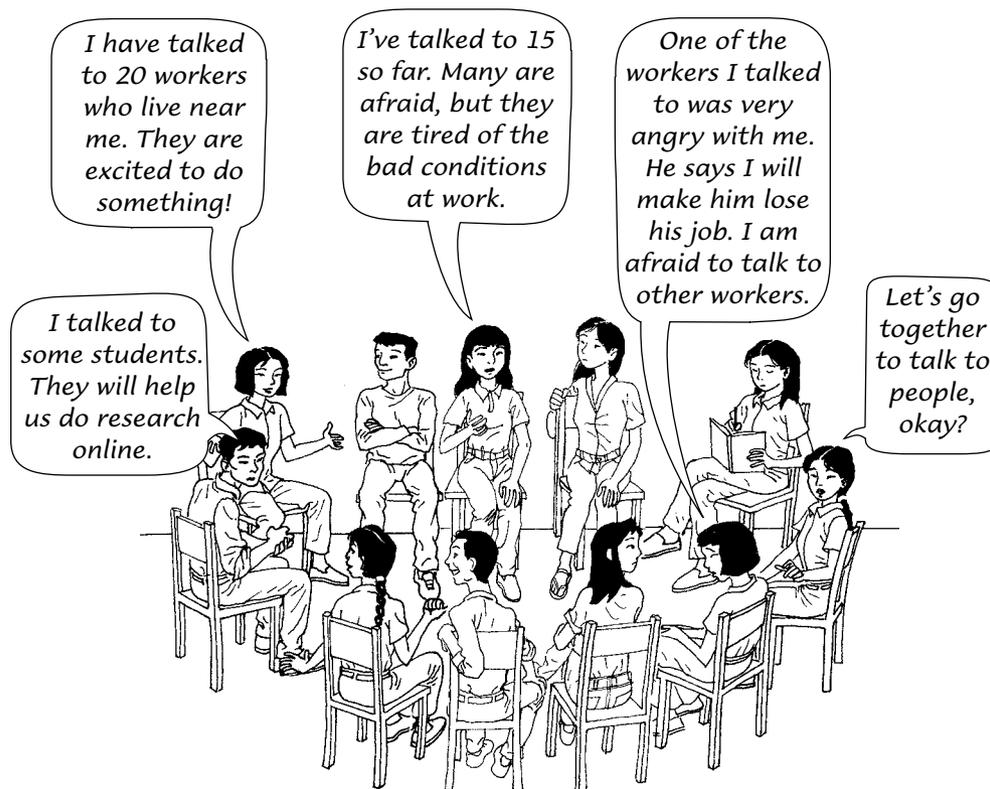
Step 4: Plan for action

Organizing workers to take action may take some time, especially if workers fear being attacked or losing their jobs. Make a plan and decide who will carry out each part. Talk about how to do each task. Share ideas and skills for successful organizing. Your first task might be to recruit more people to this organizing committee. Set a date when each task in the plan should be finished, then set a time to meet again to see how things are going.



Step 5: How is the plan going?

Have each person report on progress they are making with their tasks. Celebrate what you have accomplished, such as how many workers support the demands or are willing to take action. Then decide if you are seeing the results you expected or if you need to change the plan.



Step 6: Adjust the plan if you need to

If the work is not going according to plan, analyze why. What needs to be changed to make the plan work? Adjust the plan and decide which tasks each member of the group will do. As before, set dates when each task should be finished and when you will meet again to evaluate and adjust the plan.

If people need help to complete their tasks, talk over what is needed and who can help. A worker joining the group can take responsibility for tasks she has never done if she gets advice, training, and support from more experienced organizers. Be supportive rather than critical. Don't lose possible organizers because they make one or two mistakes.

Could an international campaign help?

Local and international organizations may be able to help workers in the factory. They can bring information and experience that may be useful. For example, they can help get information about the company that buys garments produced in a specific factory. They can find out about the labor conditions in other factories used by that company. Knowing who owns or contracts to a specific factory can be useful for organizing an international campaign to put pressure on a company to treat the factory workers better.



**When corporations are global,
your campaign can be, too!**

International campaigns can get the word of local worker efforts out to the world. The large companies that buy the products made in export factories do not like the public to see them as “sweatshop” companies. Telling the personal story of the challenges of a factory worker is an excellent way to win the support of people around the world.

An international campaign can only support the factory workers’ local campaign and goals if the workers tell the campaigners what support is needed, and if the international supporters listen. Communicating with campaigners is easier when workers are unified in a strong group. Workers can also have a strong relationship with an outside union or community group that serves as a liaison between non-unionized workers and an international campaign.

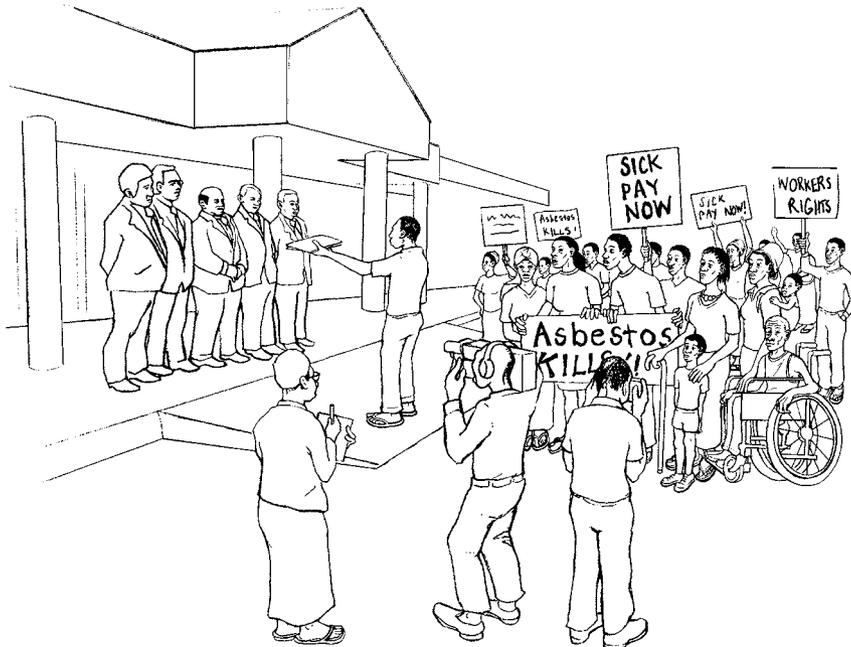
Take action to win change

There is no one way of organizing that works all the time. Many kinds of actions are possible, and many different actions may be needed to build power among workers and fix problems at work. You may win quickly or it may take months or years to win the changes you want.

Educate and reach out about workers' needs to other workers, the community, the employer and employer associations, and government officials and agencies.

Build relationships with allies and leaders in the community who can help persuade the employer and others to join in, or at least not oppose, the actions you organize. Try to build relationships with factory owners and government officials too. One of the biggest challenges you have as an organizer is to help bring out the best in all the people you work with. Focus on getting the support you need to win.

Organize many workers to take action together to demand solutions from the boss. This is a very powerful way to get employers to pay attention. It can also be risky for the workers who participate. But when more workers act together, the more powerful their message and the less risk there is to each worker. Remember, it is not your job to make deals with management. Take proposals back to the workers and let them decide. That is how collective power is strengthened.



Learn from other workers about what works

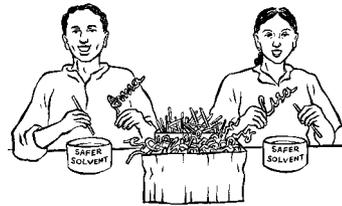
Here are different types of actions workers have used successfully in export factories around the world. Adapt them to the situation in your workplace or community to make them work for you. As a part of doing any of these or other activities, discuss what you will do to protect yourself and others from retaliation should it come.

Coordinate workers to take individual actions to make their work area better (such as bringing a pillow to sit on or making a foot rest). Or organize a boycott of an area (such as a loud machine shop) or service (such as a cafeteria). If you all do it at the same time, your boss will notice. See “Workers demand better food and win a new union,” page 407.



Learn more about health and safety issues. The more you know, the more tools you will have to get the boss and the government to listen and act. See “Women workers organize through health promotion,” page 374.

Set up a communication network among the workers, including workers from every part of the factory. Workers can pass information among themselves about chemical use in the factory, what management is planning, experiences of workers in different areas, and how workers could respond as a group. See “We now use a safer chemical,” pages 188 to 189.



Stop work for a few minutes, an hour, or longer and tell the supervisors and bosses why you are doing it. Or have different parts of the factory stop at different times. These actions work best when many workers participate. If too few people stop working, it will not succeed. See “Stand together, fan together,” page 234.

Take a delegation to the boss to discuss specific demands. Never go alone. Explain how resolving the problems will benefit the employer too. Take notes about everything that is said during the meeting, including the date and time, who was present, and what agreements were made. Take photos or record what happened with your phone.



File complaints with government agencies to get them to enforce labor, workplace safety, and anti-discrimination laws. See “How we won against forced overtime,” pages 293 to 294.

Get advice and support from lawyers and take the government or the company to court. Legal cases often take a long time, but the rulings may improve conditions for many workers. See “Cleaning wafers gave Yu-mi the cancer that killed her,” page 68.



Invite the media to your events and learn how to write news releases. Use social media to communicate among workers and with other interested people. Take and distribute photos. See “Our water turned bright blue!” on page 106.



Hold a public hearing where workers can testify to community leaders and their neighbors about problems in the factory and their demands for changes. See “We demand to know what chemicals are being used in the factory,” page 184.

Hold rallies, conferences, and workshops to educate people about the problems workers face and also to push the government to listen and act. See “Workers should not die for fashion!” on page 103.

