UCLA Labor Center

# The WORKER CONNECTION

Occupational Safety and Health Project

Spring 1979

Institute of Industrial Relations, 9244 Bunche Hall, Los Angeles, CA 90024 - (213) 825-7012

# OCCUPATIONAL DISEASE 400,000 NEW CASES

The U.S. Surgeon General's recent report on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention emphasized the role of occupational exposures in the diseases of Americans. The report stated that 100,000 people in this country die each year from occupational diseases, and almost 400,000 new cases of occupational disease are diagnosed annually.

Many illnesses which are job-related are unrecognized or unreported however, the Surgeon indicates, and therefore we really do not know how many workers and retirees are victims of occupational disease. A recent survey estimates that 9 of every 10 American industrial workers are not adequately protected against exposure to at least one of the 163 most common hazardous industrial chemicals.

Other areas of concern to the Surgeon General are:

- birth defects related to occupational exposure;
- the health effects of radiation and heat in the workplace;
- long-term exposure to low levels of chemicals, producing behavior changes in workers;
- heart disease induced by job stress and physical and chemical exposure;
- occupational causes of respiratory disease;
- special problems of women exposed to hazardous substances.

*Do you have a question about something you are working with?* Help is available - write or call the Labor Center for information and assistance.

## TCE

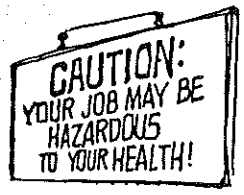
*News coverage about TCE - contaminated water in the San Gabriel Valley has raised questions among workers about its use in their workplaces.*

*TCE, or trichloroethylene, is a possible cancer-causing substance and is used in many industries.*

*A factsheet about TCE is part of this CONNECTION.*

## LEGISLATION . . .

A bill which would have required all employers to provide information about workplace substances to their employees died in a California Congressional Committee last month. Although OSHA law implies the worker's right to know about the chemicals and substances with which he works, stronger legislation is needed to guarantee that right. Much remains to be done. *(Some unions have used the collective bargaining process to insure their right to know - See pg.2)*




## Labor Center Activities

Money for Worker Education - The Labor Center has received additional grant funds to continue providing safety and health training programs and technical assistance to workers and unions. The federal Department of Labor, Occupational Safety & Health Administration believes that knowledgeable workers can be the most important force in reducing workplace hazards and creating safer places to work. Our goal is to help Southern California workers learn how to recognize health hazards (as well as safety hazards), and how to eliminate those hazards, using the collective bargaining process and legal rights.

Plans are being finalized for a series of occupational safety and health programs for Southern California workers and their representatives. To be presented in three parts, the programs will begin at a basic introductory level, and proceed through intermediate and advanced levels. The first session will cover health hazards common to most industries, workers' legal rights and responsibilities in safety and health, and what the safety and health committee can do to reduce hazardous exposures.

Watch for more information about the program in your area.

Several Union locals have requested safety and health information at general membership meetings, stewards meetings, safety and health committee meetings. Labor Center staff have participated with slide shows, films, and discussion of issues of concern to the specific union groups.

Increasing numbers of requests have been received for information on specific chemicals and legal rights. The staff is responding by phone and mail.

*Do you have a question about hazards in your workplace?* Would you like information on a material or chemical or product you are using? Would you like a presentation at your Union, or another group of interested workers? Call or write the Labor Center for help with your occupational health problems.

# RIGHT TO KNOW NEWS

Across the country, unions are becoming more aware of the importance of access to worker's medical records in identifying the health and safety problems they face. Consequently, Right to Know contract language, used to guarantee access to medical records, is becoming a priority in negotiations - and results are beginning to show.

-- The UAW in their new GM contract, has improved on their basic Right to Know language. GM is now required to share with workers the results of all testing done on their exposure to chemicals in the workplace, and to enter those results in the workers' medical files. In addition, when air sampling tests show exposure above OSHA limits, GM must review the results with those workers involved.

-- The Ohio AFL-CIO has won access to workers' medical records. Upon filing a written request, a worker (or his or her representative) is entitled to receive any records kept by the employer, including records kept by doctors, laboratories, hospitals, or other health professionals by contract with the employer.

-- The UAW has also won the Right to Know language in their new Ford Agreement. Results of all breathing zone tests of workplace chemicals must be provided to the worker and entered in his or her medical file. Workers must be notified of exposure above OSHA limits, and may, with a written request, have access to their complete file. Ford must provide the UAW with the results of all health and safety surveys in their plants. And finally the union health and safety rep. may now conduct his or her own exposure tests with any monitoring device provided by the company health and safety representative. (R.I. Committee on Occupational Safety & Health, January, 1980)

# FILMS

We have had inquiries about safety & health films that are available for public use:

"More Than a Paycheck" - a film about occupational cancer - available at no cost from Region IX, OSHA, U.S. Department of Labor, Box 36017, San Francisco 94102 (415) 556-0586.

"Song of the Canary" - about male worker sterilization from DBCP exposure in California and Brown Lung disease in southern textile mills. Available at no cost from the California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Occupational Safety & Health, P. O. Box 603, San Francisco 94101.

"Working for Your Life" - a new film depicting health & safety hazards of jobs where the majority of workers are women is available from LOHP Films, Transit Media, 779 Susquehanna Avenue, Franklin Lakes, N.J. 07417. Rental price is $65.00.

"Work and Health" is a slide-tape presentation made by Los Angeles students - an excellent introduction to occupational health & safety. It is available from our Labor Center; no charge for union locals. Call (213) 825-7012 to make arrangements.

# New Lead Standard

While major parts of the Federal OSHA lead standard remain under attack in a federal district court, Cal-OSHA has implemented the standard, with a few modifications.

The old California lead standard limited exposure to airborne lead to 150 micrograms per cubic meter of air (150 ug/$m^3$). Under the new standard, workers are to be protected from exposures over 50 ug/$m^3$, effective February 5, 1980.

By March 6, 1980, workers exposed to 30 ug/$m^3$ of lead for more than 30 days per year must be provided with

(Lead standard)

blood tests at least every 6 months, and more often if blood lead levels are above 40 milligrams of lead per 100 grams of blood (40 mg/100g). Workers who have elevated blood lead levels are also entitled to an annual medical examination by a physician, at the company's expense.

If an employee has to be removed from his regular job because of high blood lead levels, the new law requires the employer to maintain seniority and wage rates of the removed worker.

Chelating (kē-lāt), or lead-removing drugs, are not to be used to prevent lead absorption. In other words, employers or physicians may not give workers drugs or medication to keep them from becoming "leaded." Chelating drugs are very potent and potentially dangerous and should only be given to hospitalized persons who are under close medical supervision. Indiscriminate use of the drug can cause damage to the kidneys.

The new law does have some exceptions - it does not apply to construction and agricultural operations where there may be lead exposure, and the monitoring requirements do not apply to auto spray-painting.

Workers should remember - you have legal right, under OSHA and Cal-OSHA, to examine the results of environmental monitoring which the company does, to get the results of your biological monitoring (medical exams or tests), and have access to the employer's log of occupational injuries and illnesses. You should receive written notification of your airborne lead exposure each time it is measured by your employer. If your exposure is above 50 ug/$m^3$ the company must tell you in writing what measures they will take to reduce your exposure. The company also must inform you in writing if your blood lead exceeds 40 mg/100g. You cannot legally be discharged or discriminated against for exercising these rights.

*PASS IT ON - Please share this Bulletin with a friend. If this copy was passed on to you and you want to receive future OSHP bulletins and program announcements, send the coupon below and we will add your name to our Mailing List.*


OSHP STAFF

Jack Blackburn
Joyce Spencer
Bob Williams
Ruth Abelar-Russell
Liz Kubota


Name _____ Title _____

Organization _____

Address _____ Phone ( ) _____

City/State/Zip Code _____

MAIL TO: OSHP, Center for Labor Research and Education
Institute of Industrial Relations, 9244 Bunche Hall
University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90024