

SUMMARY: HEALTH AND SAFETY TRAINING WORKSHOPS, JUNE 1990

Two two-hour training sessions were held in June for Union Health and Safety Committee members, stewards and officers, and anyone else interested in on-the-job safety and health. The twenty-eight participants (some came to both sessions) included members of seven unions (UAW 1326, IAM 1607, UAW 2300, CSEA 855, CSEA 605, UAW 1774, UAW 802) and one from a nonunion workplace (J.M.Murray Ctr.).

The first session, entitled Workplace Hazards: Physical, Chemical and Biological, was led by Jim Platner, Director of the Chemical Hazard Information Program of the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University. Jim focused on the routes of entry of chemicals into workers' bodies, how various toxic chemicals affect our bodies, ways to recognize these hazards and effective ways to protect workers, including finding alternatives to toxic chemicals. Participants had questions specific to their own workplaces and to using their unions, and state and federal laws to secure safer, more healthy workplaces.

The second session, Getting Action to Improve Worker Health and Safety, included discussions by Louise DeJohn of the Communications Workers of America in Syracuse, and Lin Nelson and Bob Tompkins of Central New York Council on Occupational Safety and Health. Louise described how to design and use a workplace health/safety survey to uncover workplace hazards, how to use the Hazard Communication Standard, and the importance of record keeping, with many illustrations from her union's experience. Bob explained a number of state and federal laws with which workers have successfully secured safer and healthier working conditions, with more detail about the HCS and Right to Know laws. Lin outlined examples of linking workers' actions for a safe and healthy workplace with local community concerns around environmental issues, and the impact of politics on workers' health and safety. Participants discussed various ways their unions have secured safer and more healthy workplaces, including their use of laws and the grievance process to enforce workers' rights. Their questions centered on strategies and techniques to use, interpretations of laws, and requests for more information on specific chemicals.

Carl Feuer and Robin Whittlesey
Health/Safety Trainers
July 20, 1990