

TOMPKINS/CORTLAND LABOR COALITION

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HEALTH AND SAFETY PROGRAM

ANNUAL REPORT, 1990-1991

Back Injury Prevention Clinics

Back injury prevention clinics were organized with CSEA 605, the Ithaca School District Employees Association, APWU 1151 and UAW 2300. In each case, a walkthrough took place prior to the training; a report with recommendations for change was prepared for the union; a physical therapist conducted a back clinic. In three of the four cases, the clinic took place on company time. A brief summary of each follows.

CSEA Local 605. Focus was on grounds workers and workers at general stores at SUNY-Cortland. Twenty workers attended the clinic. A series of recommendations was provided to the union.

Ithaca School District Employees Association. The focus was on custodial, grounds and maintenance workers. The target groups seemed too diverse for a walkthrough; instead a meeting with workers was held and problem areas identified. We provided the union with a list of recommendations. Seventy workers attended the clinic which took place on company time during vacation period.

APWU Local 1151. The union targeted all clerks and maintenance people and resulted, in part, from a 200 percent increase in back injuries during the year. The walkthrough, by the physical therapist, TLC Health/Safety Trainer and Union President Mike Oates, resulted in a list of twenty recommendations. The Clinic took place one week later, in the evening, and attracted 18 workers.

UAW Local 2300. The Union targeted the General Stores department where a number of problems and high rate of injury had been identified by stewards. We conducted an inspection with the Union Health and Safety Chair which identified over twenty problem areas. Two clinic sessions occurred on company time, and were attended by 17 workers.

Two unions, Teamsters Local 65 (United Parcel Service) and SEIU Local 200A (Lakeside Nursing Home) expressed an interest in the program but were not able to get management support. In one case, however, management was stimulated to conduct its own clinic.

BOCES Employees Association
BOCES Teachers Association
Bricklayers Local 17
Carpenters Local 603
Civil Service Employees Association Local 561
Civil Service Employees Association Local 605
Civil Service Employees Association Local 849
Civil Service Employees Association Local 855
Cornell Security Employees Union
Cortland United Teachers
Electrical Workers Local 43
Electrical Workers Local 79
Electrical Workers Local 241
Electrical Workers Local 961
Fire Fighters Local 1737
Fire Fighters Local 2737
Ithaca Paraprofessionals Association
Ithaca School District Employees Association
Ithaca Teachers Association
Laborers Local 589
Machinists Local 1607
Machinists Local 1608
Musicians Local 132
National Writers Union
Operating Engineers Local 71 & 71A
Operating Engineers Local 545
Painters Local 178
Plumbers Local 267
Postal Workers Local 1151
Public Employees Federation Local 251
Service Employees Local 200A
Sheetmetal Workers Local 112
TCCC Faculty Association
Teamsters Local 65
United Auto Workers Local 802
United Auto Workers Local 1326
United Auto Workers Local 1774
United Auto Workers Local 2300
United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1
United Steel Workers of America Local 12460
United University Professions

Health and Safety Committees

An ongoing focus of the Coalition's health and safety program is to assist member unions in establishing and/or strengthening Union Health and Safety Committees. During this year we worked particularly with three unions in this area: UAW Local 802 (Monarch Machine Tool), UAW Local 1326 (Pall Trinity Micro Corp.) and UAW Local 1774 (Brewer Titchener).

UAW Local 802

Our assistance to and work with Local 802 was less intensive than in the previous year, a reflection of the fact that most of the Local's energies in the Fall were absorbed in contract negotiations.

We did organize a health and safety training workshop for Local 802 in the Spring. Dr. Jim Platner, Director, Chemical Hazard Information Program, Cornell University, led the training which concentrated on air quality and machine shop chemical hazards. Three union members also attended an additional TCLC training in June, on industrial hygiene air monitoring.

Union members feel that the Labor-Management Health and Safety Committee is responsive and effective, and are satisfied to work through it.

UAW Local 1326

We worked extensively with this Local during the year trying to stimulate membership interest in health and safety and to support the work of the H/S Committee co-chairs. Our activities with this Local during the course of the year included the following:

- participation in at least six h/s comm. meetings
- organizing a h/s training, which elicited very little interest among the membership - only one member, besides the co-chairs attended, despite a very active publicity campaign
- three members attended the TCLC industrial hygiene training in June
- assistance to the committee in its membership education campaign, consisting of the design and posting of three information flyers over the course of 4 months

One of the co-chairs resigned during the winter. Subsequent to this, more members were recruited, a formal complaint was filed with OSHA, and a major campaign initiated around poor working conditions in one of the Clean Rooms, an area where more

than 60 of the 300 plus workforce works.

UAW Local 1774

Local 1774 represents about 200 workers in an older drop forge plant, recently taken over by Cooper Industries. A newly formed health and safety committee had requested our assistance, and we began working with it for the first time during this fiscal year.

During the course of the year, we:

- helped the local develop, distribute and analyze a health and safety survey;

- assisted and provided training for committee members on a number of occasions;

- developed an OSHA inspection form for the committee to use;

- organized a training workshop on air quality and chemical hazards in the forge industry with Dr. Jim Platner as trainer and 25 workers in attendance.

Workshops and Conferences

UAW Local 2300, Food Service workers (August) - 17 workers from five dining units on the Cornell University campus participated. The workshop focused on identifying the health and safety hazards these workers face and considering how they and the union could deal with them. In addition, various hazards, particularly hand/wrist problems were dealt with in some detail.

CSEA Local 605, Office Workers (January) - 25 workers at SUNY-Cortland attended this workshop presented by Nona McQuay of the Chemical Hazard Information Program. The main topics covered were ergonomics and air quality.

UAW Local 1774, Forge Industry workers (March) - 25 workers at Brewer-Titchener attended this training conducted by Jim Platner. It focused on air quality and chemical hazards in the forge industry.

Hazards of Pesticides in the Workplace (March) - 30 attended this half-day training conference put on by the NY Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides, in conjunction with the TCLC.

UAW Local 802, Machine Tool workers (April) - 8 workers attended this training conducted by Jim Platner focusing on diesel exhaust, coolants and other hazards affecting machine tool

workers.

Air Quality Monitoring: Playing Industrial Hygiene to Win (June)
- 17 workers attended this training conference facilitated by Greg Siwinski, Industrial Hygienist with the CNY Occupational Health Clinical Center

FYI

FYI, A Health and Safety Newsletter for Office Workers was published on a quarterly basis, with circulation rising to more than 1,000 by the final issue. The newsletter has been extremely well received; we are frequently contacted by individuals wanting to be added to the mailing list and have gotten positive feedback from those already receiving it.

Though staff contribute the bulk of the effort in producing FYI (primarily collecting information, writing and layout), a number of other office workers and supporters participate as well. We hope to elicit greater involvement from these people.

Information and Referral

During the course of the year, the Health/Safety trainers dealt with approximately 76 unsolicited requests for information, ranging from workers compensation issues to concerns about specific chemicals in the workplace. We were able to satisfy most of these requests, either over the phone or by sending literature. Our resource center continues to grow, and is more than adequate for most requests for information.

One request for assistance, involving air quality problems at South Hill School in Ithaca, necessitated more extensive involvement. Staff helped draft a health survey which was distributed to parents and teachers and attended a staff-parent meeting.

The Working Press continued to feature a "Health and Safety Page" with articles and other items pertinent to worker safety.

Workers Memorial Day

This year was the first that the Labor Coalition decided to commemorate Workers Memorial Day with a series of events. Charlie Streeter's tragic death in November energized much of our activity around this day, Sunday April 28th.

1) We co-sponsored a benefit brunch Sunday morning at Moosewood Restaurant. This was a joint labor-environment event with the bulk of the proceeds going toward the third statewide labor and

environment conference to be held in November. The rest of the proceeds went toward funding the day's events. The brunch was very well attended (thanks mostly to labor's efforts) and a large amount of money was raised. We strengthened ties with environmental groups, though the event reinforced our view that the bulk of the environmental community here is poorly organized and not readily mobilized on labor issues.

2) Our memorial service, march and rally held in Homer directly after the brunch was very successful. About 125 people attended and were alternately moved (by the memorial service) and mobilized by the militant march and rally. A tree was planted at the site of the accident, as a permanent memorial to Charlie's memory and to all those killed in work-related accidents in Central NY.

3) Press coverage, before and after the events, was excellent. The highlight was a full length Ithaca Journal editorial which was very supportive.

4) We linked up with CNYCOSH and Syracuse Central Labor Council to make this a fully central NY event.

Ithaca College

A major unplanned activity during the year was our efforts to train and assist office workers at a non-union workplace (Ithaca College). Early in the year we were contacted for assistance by four College employees, all of whom had contracted Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Illness at work (three from one building) and were disabled. The College refused to acknowledge any problem or that the illnesses were work-related.

The workers asked for assistance to fulfill two objectives: 1) to achieve a safe workplace for those workers still at work; and 2) to pressure the College to provide the disabled workers with their due compensation.

During the course of this year-long and ongoing campaign we:

- held numerous meetings with the IC workers;

- helped train the workers to use the media;

- helped the workers draft and distribute an informational letter to all IC employees;

- helped the workers draft a formal complaint to OSHA and to mediate with OSHA;

- helped identify and elicit other sources of assistance and legal support, including the NLRB.

In terms of working conditions at the College, our efforts have borne some fruit: there have been improvements in Job Hall; there is now greater sensitivity and responsiveness to occupational health concerns; procedures and staff have been strengthened; an outside consultant was contracted with; faculty have moved to establish a faculty-staff health and safety committee to monitor conditions on an ongoing basis; workers are far more educated and aware of workplace health/safety concerns than they were before.