Worker Leaders Becoming Teachers of Action

In collaboration with Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ) National COSH delivered a 3 day bilingual (English & Spanish) Training of the Trainers (TtT) on March 18-20, 2011 in Chicago, IL. The course was delivered by National COSH and IWJ staff with outreach support from the local Chicago COSH, which brought participants from across the country including other Susan Hardwood OSHA grantees, such as Casa Maryland and Nebraska Appleseed. The 35 graduates of the course acquired skills necessary for developing a training plan and serving as facilitators in the promotion of safer and healthier workplaces.

The TtT built on the leadership capacity of workers and staff in some of the most prominent worker advocate organizations and began with a review of a Worker Health and Safety Timeline in which participants incorporated their personal significant life event which triggered their interest in the worker safety movement. Participants not only expanded their knowledge on worker health and safety but learned to build strategic action plans to take back to their membership and build effective programs.

Special thanks to Luzdary Giraldo from NYCOSH, Emmanuel Black from Chicago COSH, and Peter Dooley for supporting this program as facilitators. The next TtT program will be in August 2011 in North Carolina, please stay tuned for more information and helps us spread the word!
SoCalCOSH: Workers’ Memorial Day 2011

On April 30, 2011 the Southern California Coalition on Occupational Safety and Health (SoCalCOSH) held their annual Workers’ Memorial Day Commemoration in downtown Los Angeles. It was a beautiful, inspiring, and moving event consisting of a symbolic funeral procession embraced by cars covered by multi-lingual posters bringing awareness around the prevalence of worker injuries and fatalities, live music, a resource fair, family testimonies of fallen workers, and the newly appointed Chief of Cal/OSHA Ellen Widess as keynote speaker.

“Safe Jobs Save Lives. Our Work’s Not Done.” was the theme for the 2011 Workers’ Memorial Day Commemoration. This is a historic year for workers’ safety and health; we’re observing the 100th anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire and the 40th anniversary of OSHA and the right of workers to a safe workplace. In this year’s commemoration, we emphasized that although there have been gains in the struggle for workers’ safety and health, our work is not finished. There is an urgent need to organize, fight and demand action. Workers continue suffering from illnesses, injuries or are killed on the job every day. Our 2011 Workers’ Memorial Day Commemoration honored our sisters and brothers that have lost their lives on the job, and it also served as a tool to assist southern California’s working families, local labor leaders, and grieving families to demand that employers and government protect our loved ones in the workplace.

We had 250 workers, labor leaders and grieving families, representing a total of 24 organizations, attending our 2011 Workers’ Memorial Day.

Some of the attendees included:

• Car Wash Workers, Adult Film Industry Workers, Taxi Drivers, Warehouse Workers, Domestic Workers, Sanitation and Trash Workers, Day Laborers, among others.
• Community and labor groups including CLEAN Car Wash Campaign, LAANE, IDEPSCA, NDロン, UNITE HERE 11, NPMHU 303, USW 675, Teamsters 63, among many others.
• Cal/OSHA District Office Representatives

The goal of our annual Workers’ Memorial Day Commemoration is to humanize the discussion around Workers Health and Safety. We aim to bring the human factor to this issue and to allow the voices of fallen workers into the dialogue. We emphasize that our work will not be complete until every worker is able return home each day from work the same way they left.

The mission of SoCalCOSH is to educate, advocate, and mobilize workers, community members, and policymakers to create safe and healthy workplaces in Southern California. We are a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to improving health and safety conditions through worker empowerment and collective policy advocacy action.

We look forward to continuing to engage and collaborate with organizations, workers, unions, faith groups, CBO’s, health & social service organizations and public agencies in the Southern California Community to keep us, our friends, families, loved ones, and communities safer on the job.

by Shirley Alvarado-del Aguila, SoCalCOSH Coordinator
MassCOSH: Pollos A La Brasa El Chalan

A tale of two restaurants ends with an unparalleled victory for the worker safety movement

After experiencing wage theft and unsafe conditions, workers at Pollos El Chalan in East Boston have not only transformed the popular chicken eatery into being a responsible employer but have opened up their own restaurant, Sabor Centroamericano, determined to be a model for how a business can be profitable while ensuring workers safe, secure employment.

Frustrated at being owed thousands of dollars in overtime and daily exposure to toxic chemicals, frayed wiring, unbearable temperature extremes, and burns from a poorly designed kitchen, Chelsea restaurant employees Martin and 2 of his co-workers came to the MassCOSH Worker Center looking for options. They took legal action to recover their wages with help from MassCOSH lawyers’ network attorney, Warren Pile, and filed an OSHA complaint.

Bravely standing up to their employer and risking their livelihood, Martin and his co-workers aggressively took a stand, demanding their right to fair, safe, and secure employment.

“What these workers did is not something everyone can do,” said Worker Center Coordinator Jonny Arevalo. “Not many people can imagine actually walking up to their boss and saying ‘what you are doing is wrong and it needs to stop now.’ But that’s exactly what they did; no one should have to risk being hurt on the job for a paycheck.”

Despite resulting OSHA fines of $2,200 and a court-ordered payment of $17,000 to the workers, just one year later, Mario Pineda, a cook from another Pollo restaurant, contacted the Worker Center reporting similar claims. Like his co-workers before him, Pineda was prepared to do everything in his power to recover his wages and ensure he and his co-workers remained safe on the job.

After a delegation of workers and MassCOSH volunteers visited the restaurant urging the owner to changes his ways or face a public protest, he quickly complied. Now MassCOSH is helping the workers form a safety committee to serve as permanent watchdogs, and – on work time – all employees will receive safety training. MassCOSH occupational health volunteers Lenore Azaroff and Elise Pechter conducted a walk-through, helping the owner identify and address hazards.

As for Pineda, he longer works for Pollo. Instead, the former cook is now a restaurant owner himself, having recently purchased and opened his own restaurant, Sabor Centroamericano, specializing in Salvadorian fare. So moved by the actions MassCOSH had taken on his behalf, Pineda invited the Worker Center to tour his business to ensure it would meet all state health and safety regulations and workers are aware and given all their rights.

Pineda, now a key MassCOSH volunteer, is going even further to ensure restaurant worker safety in his neighborhood. Pineda is meeting with the owners of other small restaurants to help them comply with regulations for workers and ensure fair and safe working conditions.

“It’s important to take action when something needs to be fixed [that can threaten worker safety], said Pineda. “MassCOSH taught me so much about worker rights and how the labor system works. At Sabor Centroamericano we are doing all we can to make sure our workers stay safe and healthy.”
NHCOSH: New Hampshire Health Officers Receive Emergency Response Training

New Hampshire COSH with the collaboration of the NH Health Officers Association sponsored an 8 hour Emergency Response Awareness refresher for the municipal health officers on March 23, at the Plumbers and Steamfitters Hall in Hookset. Health officers who attended this daylong training were to update their OSHA certification. Instructors Jimmy Smith, of NH COSH and Dave Coffey, from TNEC were on hand to answer the health officers questions, concerns, provide specialized instruction, and walk them through a review of the Emergency Response Awareness course.

Training in emergency response awareness is key to a quick and safe response to any hazard or emergency the participants may face during their workday. OSHA requires that personnel who are likely to come in contact with hazardous situations or materials be trained on how to recognize a hazardous situation, chemical release, and how to properly respond. This OSHA standard came to be the standard for anyone who might be involved in an emergency situation after the events of 9-11.

TNEC tailors its Emergency Response Awareness Course to the participants training needs for each course. The curriculum was developed to be delivered to State Medical Examiners, Police and Fire departments, Health Officers, and Hospitals. Working in groups, participants completed hands-on activities specifically selected for their training. The trainers solicited experiences from the health officers then used these experiences in discussions about how they might be involved in responding to them. Other selected examples of hazardous incidents are included in the course materials for participants to become familiar with good response techniques when faced with an emergency situation. Through these activities the participants were given the opportunity to practice their skills and discuss the requirements for cooperation between town and state departments in times of emergency through the common themes that they might face.

Participants reviewed the common actions including; preplanning, understanding “all hazards” approach to incidents and understand the common elements in responding to all incidents. They looked at equipment and PPE (personal protective equipment) that can be carried by all health officers in their “go bags” while reviewing the elements of a “safe” response protecting self first, for a better safer response.

The health officers who attended this training received individual attention. One health officer commented that he felt “pampered” because they received so much individualized attention.

By Sandra Chabot, NH COSH Staff
In New York, this Fall, there will be many events marking the tenth anniversary of the attack on September 11, 2011 that memorialize the brave responders and mourn the many victims.

Few, if any, of these events, however, will address the issues of public policy. Nor are they likely to examine how the attack resulted in the worst environmental disaster in New York City’s history, and how occupational and environmental exposures have damaged the health of tens of thousands of workers, volunteers, and residents, and cost an unknown additional number their lives.

NYCOSH is taking action to fill this void. Working with a broad coalition of unions, community based organizations and public health advocates, NYCOSH will hold a conference on September 16th: Protecting Worker and Community Health: Are We Prepared for the Next 9/11?

It will be a working conference to discuss how harm occurred, what steps have been taken to prevent such occupational and environmental health hazards in future catastrophes, and what still needs to be done to insure harm can be avoided in future disaster response efforts. The conference will undertake a frank assessment of public health regulation and policy in order to identify and advocate for the changes necessary to better protect the health of rescue, recovery, and cleanup workers and area workers and residents in future disasters.

Policy issues to be discussed include:
• The adequacy of the regulatory framework that is supposed to protect the health of disaster responders
• Exposure assessment, risk communication, sampling, and data collection and sharing
• The broader human and environmental consequences of large disasters
• Vulnerable populations, including immigrant workers
• Access to medical care and workers’ compensation
• Appropriateness and extent of worker emergency preparedness training

The conference will be held on September 16th at the United Federation of Teachers, 52 Broadway in Lower Manhattan. David Michaels, Assistant Secretary of Labor for OSHA, John Howard, Director of the National Institute for Occupational Health and Linda Birnbaum, Director of the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences have already agreed to participate.

by Maureen La Mar, NYCOSH Staff
New Jersey WEC: United Action paid off for the Worker Environment Council (WEC) and their Partners

Wall Street and corporate CEOs are attacking basic health and safety safeguards in our workplaces and our communities. But more than 70 labor, environmental, and community organizations united in the New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC) continue to show that by working together we can make new progress and defend past gains.

Here are some recent accomplishments by WEC and their partners:

• **PREVENTING TOXIC CATASTROPHIES THROUGH WORKER/UNION PARTICIPATION**
  WEC led a multi-year effort with the BlueGreen Alliance and 106 labor, environmental, and community organizations that won a landmark new national policy from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ensuring worker participation. Employees and their union representatives now have new rights across the nation to participate during EPA inspections and point out risks to prevent catastrophic chemical releases at approximately 13,000 of the nation’s potentially most dangerous industrial facilities. And, prompted by WEC, the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board pledged to adopt a policy to engage workers and family members during its “root cause” investigations of chemical disasters.

• **STOPPING WORKERS FROM BEING USED AS GUINEA PIGS**
  Supporting the Professional Emergency Medical Services Association of NJ (PEMSA), WEC helped stop toxic misting of ambulances by the Monmouth Ocean Hospital Services Corporation (MONOC). This case has national implications for whether workers can be used as guinea pigs to try out toxic chemicals and is an important demonstration of how protecting workers can also protect the community – in this case, patients being transported by ambulances. PEMSMA, which is affiliated with the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), maintains that union members are sick because of MONOC’s use of a new misting process for decontamination marketed by Zimek Technologies. Because of union complaints, EPA ordered MONOC to stop applying pesticides acquired from Zimek in a manner inconsistent with their labeling. OSHA asked MONOC to stop using the Zimek machine, to use safer decontamination methods, and to cooperate with a NIOSH Health Hazard Evaluation. IAFF alerted its members nationwide concerning EPA’s action against MONOC. The media, including the online edition of The New York Times, have covered this ongoing battle.

• **DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP FOR SAFE AND HEALTHY WORKPLACES**
  WEC continued programs to provide leadership training that resulted in practical health and safety improvements. Preventing Chemical Accidents reached 400 workers (and managers) at facilities using high hazard chemicals. This training led to safer chemical storage, better electrical “lockout-tagout” procedures, enhanced emergency communication systems, and new work procedures. Safe Work, Safe Care provided training on occupational and environmental health hazards onsite in hospitals and long-term care facilities to 282 workers (and managers). SWSC workshops led to six long-term care facilities establishing joint health and safety committees.

In 2010, WEC directly reached more than 12,700 workers and members of the public through training, education, and outreach activities (not including through media coverage, email communications, or our web site).

**CONGRATULATIONS NJWEC ON YOUR 2010-11 ACCOMPLISHMENTS!**