

Labor Occupational Health Program MONITOR



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- TRIANGLE FIRE



On the Cover:

The vocal group Swingshift entertains at the VDT Coalition's "Speak Out" on February 7, 1986 in San Francisco. More than 75 Bay Area workers who use video display terminals on the job attended the "Speak Out"; many shared personal experiences with health problems related to VDTs. See the story on page 3. (Photo courtesy of VDT Coalition.)

Labor Occupational Health Program MONITOR

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LOHP is a labor education project of the Institute of Industrial Relations which produces a variety of printed and audiovisual materials on occupational health, and conducts workshops, conferences, and training sessions for California workers and unions. A catalog of available materials and a brochure which describes training services are available upon request.

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Staff: Robin Baker, LOHP Director; Paul Chown, Labor Center Chairman; Gene Darling, **Monitor** Editor; Darryl Alexander; Stephanie Cannizzo; Anne Maramba-Ferrell; Lela Morris; Patricia Quinlan; Susan Salisbury; Laura Stock.

LOHP Offers Advanced Ventilation Course in June

LOHP's Continuing Education component will offer a five-day course, **Advanced Topics in Industrial Ventilation**, from June 9-13, 1986. The course is primarily designed for health and safety professionals, including industrial hygienists and safety engineers as well as union and management health and safety personnel. Fee for the week is \$550 (excluding meals and lodging, but including textbooks and a pre-programmed calculator).

The five days of lectures and laboratory sessions will include an extensive review of the fundamentals of designing, installing, and evaluating ventilation systems. There will be special emphasis on ventilation in high tech facilities, laboratories, electronics plants, and government installations, although other areas chosen by students in the class will also be covered. Among the topics to be considered are types of hoods, calculator and computer aided duct design, fan theory, measuring system performance, troubleshooting, understanding blueprints and specifications, cost estimating, hazardous materials handling, and air cleaning.

The course will be held at the Berkeley Conference Center, 2105 Bancroft Way, Berkeley, California from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm each day. Course Director will be D. Jeff Burton, MS, PE, CIH, CSP, of the University of Utah's Mechan-

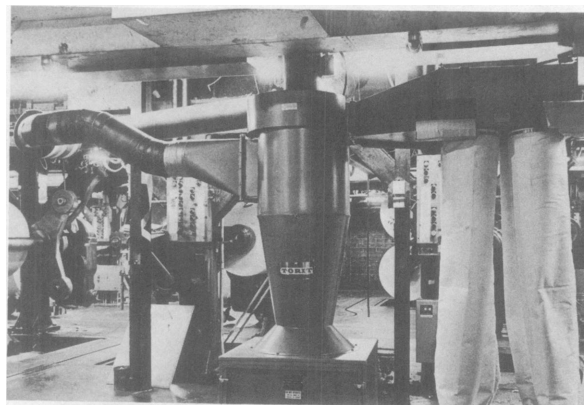


Photo courtesy of Center for Labor Research and Education.

ical Engineering Department and College of Medicine.

Under certain circumstances, discount registrations are available. Also, a block of rooms has been reserved for out-of-town participants at a discount rate at a local hotel. For further information, please call LOHP's Continuing Education Coordinator, Lela Morris, R.N., M.P.H., or her assistant Stephanie Cannizzo, at (415) 642-5507.

MONITOR is now published quarterly (four issues per year.) The last issue was Vol. 13 No. 4 (Fall 1985). All present subscribers will receive the number of issues for which they paid. Effective immediately, new subscriptions and renewals will be \$10.00 per year (four issues).

Bay Area VDT Workers "Speak Out"

More than 75 Northern California workers who use video display terminals (VDTs) on their jobs gathered in downtown San Francisco on February 7, 1986 for a "Speak Out" on the hazards of this new technology. Sponsored by the Bay Area VDT Coalition, the "Speak Out" gave rank and file workers the chance to voice their concerns to state and local policymakers and to the media.

"We hope to create a situation where we, as the *real* experts, have an opportunity to tell our policymakers what kinds of problems we have and what changes should be made," said Jean Miller, a "Speak Out" organizer, in her opening remarks. Miller, a member of Office and Professional Employees Local 3, is also active in the VDT Coalition, a network of unions and individual office workers who are organizing to address the problems caused by office automation. The six-year-old Coalition shares office space and staff in Berkeley with LOHP.

Those attending reached one consensus: it is very difficult for a worker alone to deal with the health problems, stress, and potential job loss associated with the new computerized workplace. Numerous speakers emphasized organization as the most effective way for VDT workers to convince employers to adopt adequate safeguards. One suggested formation of workplace committees where there is not yet a union. Many others advocated joining a union and obtaining health and ergonomic improvements through collective bargaining.

A panel of public officials and media representatives was assembled by the Coalition to listen to workers talk about their jobs and their VDTs. The panel included: Nancy Walker, member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors; Wilson Riles, Jr., of the Oakland City Council; Gerald O'Hara, Teamsters lobbyist and member of the Cal/OSHA Standards Board; Berkeley Vice Mayor Veronika Fukson; Sue Ellen Thompson, aide to U.S. Rep. Barbara Boxer (D.-Marin County); Judy Corbett, aide to Assemblyman Tom Hayden (D.-Santa Monica); and Brenda Payton, *Oakland Tribune* columnist, herself a VDT user and member of The Newspaper Guild.



A panel of political leaders listen to worker testimony at the VDT Coalition's "Speak Out." Among panel participants: Nancy Walker, a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors (at left); and Wilson Riles, Jr., of the Oakland City Council (second from left). Also at the table are Laura Stock, staff coordinator of the VDT Coalition (third from left); and Jean Miller of Office and Professional Employees Local 3 (at right). (Photo courtesy of VDT Coalition.)

STRESS AND VISION PROBLEMS

Many of the workers who spoke identified stress and vision problems as the primary difficulties they and their co-workers experience with VDTs. A legal secretary who has used a VDT for more than five years said she goes home each day feeling tired and tense, but is unable to sleep. Her eyes are often irritated. Yet, she said, her supervisors are not insensitive and her general working conditions are not bad. Ironically, she finds it difficult to insist upon more rest breaks away from the VDT because her employers are friendly and treat her well.

"It is really hard to speak out when your employers are nice to you," she said.

Another legal secretary said she became seriously concerned about VDT effects when a co-worker was taken to a hospital emergency room with dizziness and blurred vision. "She couldn't stand up. All she could do was lie on the

floor," the secretary said. She was surprised to learn that four other people in the firm had experienced similar symptoms, which had become known in the firm as a "stress attack." "I wonder what goes on to cause such terrible symptoms?" she asked.

Another worker said the lighting in her office is so bright that workers routinely bring "umbrellas to hang above them to keep the glare from being so bad."

A typography shop manager who is losing vision in one eye said, "Doctors don't know what it is. I know it's the VDT because when I get away from it for three or four days, I start to see better and the redness goes away."

A hospital registraton worker who suffers from tension, depression, and burning and tearing eyes at night said, "I thought it was because of my pillow. My doctor said it was possible that it was from the VDT, but a lot of doctors don't want to admit it."

continued on page 4

VDT SPEAK OUT

continued from page 3

Laura Stock, VDT Coalition staff coordinator, said that vision problems are the most common complaint of VDT users. Dozens of speakers agreed with her.

But other speakers brought up a host of additional VDT complaints. A computer programmer told of losing the feeling in the little finger of one hand after a few weeks of working constantly on a terminal. He said that he finally realized the problem was caused by being in one position too long.

Larkie Gildersleeve, a "Speak Out" organizer and Administrative Officer of the Northern California Newspaper Guild, said there is also a possibility that VDTs may cause skin problems. She said that she recently talked to a worker who had developed a skin rash on her face, a rash she never had before using a VDT.

Gildersleeve added that some employers use their computer systems to monitor the productivity of employees working on VDTs. This surveillance is a form of "speedup" and contributes to workers' anxiety and stress, she pointed out.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

According to several speakers, one problem for workers who seek medical treatment or workplace changes is that the "cause and effect" relationship between VDT use and some of the symptoms is still circumstantial and not yet scientifically established. It is difficult to make the "cause and effect" connection. Many physicians are either unaware that the symptoms they see may be connected to VDT work, or do not believe that there is any relationship. Even workers sometimes blame their symptoms on themselves, not their VDTs. A Stanford University researcher pointed out that "it is very easy to attribute subtle symptoms to yourself, and not to the equipment you're using." But there is now emerging very persuasive evidence that VDTs are implicated at least in some visual, stress, and musculoskeletal disorders.

Stock suggested that, when taking their problems to a doctor who may be unaware of VDT effects or skeptical about them, workers arm themselves with as much information about VDTs as possible. Workers should insist upon eye exams, and "be prepared to discuss with their doctors how many hours they work on VDTs, the layout of the

workstation, and whether the symptoms subside after work or on weekends," Stock said.

BARGAINING AND LEGISLATION

The group overwhelmingly supported organization as the best way to tackle the problem. Stock said that many unions have succeeded in winning regular, employer-paid vision care through contract negotiations, and some have won VDT glare standards. Other goals to aim at include adjustable chairs, copy holders, detached keyboards, screens with contrast controls, and monitors that can be tilted or swiveled to suit the user. But unfortunately, only about 15 percent of all VDT users in the U.S. are union members, Stock continued. Thus in many cases "workers must take matters into their own hands and form workplace committees to study and improve conditions."

The panelists appeared impressed with the need to improve VDT working conditions. O'Hara urged workers to bring their concerns to Cal/OSHA. O'Hara also sounded a cautionary note about another approach favored by many of those present—regulating VDTs through legislation. He counseled against



Betty Szudy of Teamsters Local 2707 "speaks out" on VDTs. (Photo courtesy of VDT Coalition.)

aiming for initial legislation that is too comprehensive. "It really disappoints me to see the enthusiasm of groups like this get lost over a big bill that goes nowhere," O'Hara said. Comprehensive, labor-supported VDT safety bills introduced by Assemblyman Tom Hayden (D.-Santa Monica) have failed in the last three sessions of the California Legislature. *(See the accompanying report on 1986 legislative developments.)*

Several other panelists expressed optimism that government on the local level could play a role. Fukson said that the City of Berkeley might bring phys-

ical problems of VDT users to the attention of the medical community in the process of negotiating employee health care packages. Riles said setting standards for VDT use in municipal jobs "is do-able in Oakland." He added, "This is something we'll bring up and deal with."

According to Pete Rockwell, a member of the Bay Area Typographical Union and one of the organizers of the "Speak Out", the event "couldn't have been better. . . . It's clear that this is an issue of major importance and that people are ready and willing to fight for

the changes they need." As a first step, many people expressed interest in attending future Coalition meetings and in subscribing to the group's newsletter, *Video Views*. In addition, audio and video tapes of the "Speak Out" are now being made available to local radio and TV.

(Adapted from Video Views, the quarterly newsletter of the Bay Area VDT Coalition. Subscriptions are available for \$5./year from: VDT Coalition, c/o LOHP, 2521 Channing Way, Berkeley, CA 94720. Make check payable to: VDT Coalition.)

New VDT Bill Dies in California Legislature

For the third year in a row, a labor-backed bill to establish health and safety protection for video display terminal operators has been killed in the California Legislature. This year's VDT bill (SB 1996, introduced by Senator Bill Greene, D.-Los Angeles) died in mid-April, 1986 in the Senate Industrial Relations Committee.

An estimated 750,000 Californians and 13 million Americans use VDTs regularly in their jobs.

Worker representatives originally expressed optimism that this year's bill had a better chance of passage than the VDT bills which the Legislature killed in 1984 and 1985. The bill represented a new approach for labor. The two earlier bills, both introduced by Assemblyman Tom Hayden (D.-Santa Monica), attempted to mandate specific ergonomic and safety standards as well as employer-paid eye exams and free glasses. Greene's 1986 bill, on the other hand, sought to require Cal/OSHA to issue a VDT standard to be developed by a special advisory committee.

According to Tom Rankin, research

director of the California Labor Federation, labor originally hoped that Greene's bill would be more acceptable because it made use of the state's regular administrative system for establishing health and safety standards. The 1984 and 1985 bills had been attacked by opponents in part on the grounds that legislation should not mandate the specifics of health and safety since the administrative system is available to handle these concerns.

The Greene bill would also have required Cal/OSHA to monitor developments in the area of low-level radiation from VDTs, and to update the VDT standard in the future to cover radiation if such protection were "deemed appropriate."

APRIL HEARING

At the April hearing in the Senate Industrial Relations Committee, representatives of employers and computer manufacturers attacked SB 1996, focusing on the bill's "presumption" that

VDTs do pose health hazards and that consequently a Cal/OSHA standard is necessary. Labor witnesses who packed the hearing room never had a chance to speak. Instead, the committee quickly amended Greene's measure, eliminating the "presumption" and leaving the bill in a form that called only for a study of VDT hazards.

John F. Henning, head of the California AFL-CIO, said that labor could not support the amended bill, and Greene withdrew SB 1996 from consideration.

A bill similar to the amended measure which Greene withdrew remains alive in the state Assembly. AB 2742, introduced by Assemblyman Richard Floyd (D.-Gardena) calls only for a state VDT study. Henning called it "a mere study bill, the result of which would be to deter the remedial action that [was] the essence of the [original] Greene bill." Another bill still alive in the Assembly would establish comfort and safety guidelines for purchases of VDTs by the University of California and other public colleges.

Berkeley's Optometry School Opens VDT Clinic

The first eye clinic in the U.S. to specialize in problems associated with the use of video display terminals has opened at the University of California at Berkeley.

The VDT Eye Clinic is one of several clinics run by the University's School of Optometry. Charging a fee of about \$38 for an eye exam, it is open to the University's staff, faculty, and students as well as the general public. In part, the clinic is supported by donations from AT&T and Westinghouse.

According to Dr. James Sheedy, assistant clinical professor of optometry and chief of the new clinic, the service grew out of optometry clinic personnel's realization that they were seeing increasing numbers of office workers who "showed greater symptoms than they would in the old office setting."

"We wanted to provide a service, plus the school was involved in research in this area," Sheedy says.

Primary among the new clinic's concerns are VDTs' adverse effects on both eye health and productivity. "Eyestrain and decreased performance go hand-in-hand," Sheedy says. He points out that, for this reason, VDT users' problems affect both themselves and their employers, and both workers and employers have an interest in solutions.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND VISUAL PROBLEMS

A patient's examination at the VDT Eye Clinic is unusually comprehensive, incorporating a look at the work environment, thorough visual tests, evaluation of eyewear, user education, and recommendations for change.

Work environment: Before coming in, each patient is asked to answer a three-page questionnaire which covers symptoms as well as an inch-by-inch description of the work environment. The work environment portion of the questionnaire asks for information on chair, screen, and keyboard height; legroom; distance between eyes and screen; type of terminal; and lighting conditions.

Sheedy says that lighting considerations are particularly important. Patients may report flickering or "jittering" on

the screen, an important clue in diagnosing the cause of eyestrain. Clinic staff also note whether the screen displays dark characters on a light background, which are considered easier to view. Another concern is whether there is fluorescent lighting in the user's office. (Fluorescent lights may cause a phenomenon known as "beating," which is suspected to play a role in eye problems. "Beating" occurs because fluorescent lights flash on and off at a high, imperceptible rate and the VDT screen does the same. The combination of the two flashing patterns is perceived subliminally.)

Visual exam: During the physical eye exam itself, optometrists pay special attention to patients' sensitivity to glare, their ability to focus, and any trouble with eye movement or coordination. All of these can contribute to eyestrain when working on a VDT, Sheedy explains. "Many people have borderline vision problems to start with, and the strain of working with the VDT puts them over the edge," he says. Sheedy adds that the clinic is seeing more of these visual problems than expected.

Eyewear: In another portion of the examination, a patient's lens prescriptions and eyewear design are evaluated as the patient sits at a model VDT workstation designed to approximate his or her actual work area. New lenses may be prescribed, including special tinted lenses under some circumstances.

Education/Recommendations for change: Optometrists show patients how differences between VDT and typewriter design can affect work. For example, patients are told how improper lighting, reflections in the screen, poorly placed reference material, and bad posture can lead to trouble. "A lot of this is because, unlike a typewriter, a VDT screen may make you look up," Sheedy explains.

VDT users are advised to arrange the workstation, if possible, so they sit at an angle to the screen which allows them to look slightly downward, like a typist. Among other benefits, such a position avoids the glare from overhead lights.

Clinic staff also show VDT users how to position antiglare filters, and how to adjust brightness and contrast on the screen. They are advised to turn down the brightness. "There's a tendency to think the brighter the better, but that's not true," Sheedy says. Overall office lighting should also be lower for VDT operation, he adds, although reducing it can be difficult if other workers in the office are doing non-VDT work which requires brighter light. In these cases, localized lighting in different parts of the office may be necessary.

Other recommendations which may be made at this point range from changing sitting position, to rearranging work materials, to installing shades on the windows, to wearing darker clothes which will not reflect on the screen.

The VDT Eye Clinic may be reached at (415) 642-5761.

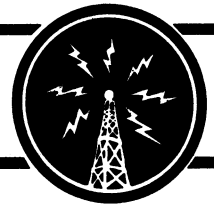
Court Restrains "Safety Bingo" in Wisconsin

A Wisconsin highway workers' union has won a Circuit Court restraining order against Milwaukee County's attempt to institute a bingo game.

The county Highway Division unilaterally began a "Safety Bingo" program which involved issuing all employees a bingo card. On each work day when there were no injuries resulting in lost time, a number was drawn. Winning cards resulted in cash prizes.

Local 882 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) took the county to court, claiming that the game violated the collective bargaining agreement. Union officials considered the game a substitute for a real safety program, and charged that it discouraged employees from reporting accidents or seeking medical attention.

—WISCONSIN Health and Safety News



Union Carbide Fined \$1.4 Million for West Virginia Violations

In early April, 1986, U.S. Secretary of Labor William Brock announced that federal OSHA has assessed Union Carbide's chemical plant in Institute, West Virginia nearly \$1.4 million in penalties for 221 health and safety violations. The fine is the highest in OSHA's history.

Among other chemicals, the Institute plant manufactures MIC (methyl isocyanate), used in making pesticides. The plant is similar to the Union Carbide MIC plant in Bhopal, India, where a leak of the toxic gas in December, 1984 took an estimated 2500 lives. (See *Monitor*, March-April, 1985, page 6.)

15 OSHA inspectors spent six months

at the Institute facility. "We found what we believe to be very serious problems with the Institute plant's safety systems, its recordkeeping, its safety and health programs, and its safety management," Brock said. He added that some of the violations were "conscious, overt, and willful." Eight of the citations were formally classified as "willful" violations. Brock announced that OSHA has also referred the case to the Justice Department and the Environmental Protection Agency for possible additional action.

According to Brock, "We found employees being asked to detect the presence of deadly [phosgene] gas by

sniffing the air after alarms indicated a leak. We used to use canaries for that."

Over \$1 million of the total penalty amount involved Union Carbide's failure to report worker injuries.

Union Carbide responded to the penalties with a statement which called OSHA's findings "an outrageous misrepresentation of the truth." The company is expected to appeal.

Earlier OSHA penalties of \$32,100 against Union Carbide (for an August, 1985 chemical leak at Institute) were reduced by 86% when the company appealed to the federal Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission.

Bhopal Researcher Finds Pregnancy Problems

Miscarriages and infant mortality have increased dramatically in the Indian city of Bhopal following the December, 1984 chemical leak there.

Dr. D. R. Varma of McGill University in Montreal was allowed access to the exposed population near the Union Carbide plant where the leak occurred, and conducted a preliminary survey of 3270 families which focused on pregnancy outcomes.

When the methyl isocyanate (MIC) leak occurred, there were 865 pregnancies within the group. 43.8% of them did not lead to live births, a figure three to four times higher than the rate for the Indian population at large. Of

the 486 live births, 14.2% died within 30 days, compared to an average infant mortality in India of less than 3% in the two years preceding the accident.

Dr. Varma added that women in the first trimester at the time of the accident appear to have had the highest miscarriage and infant mortality rates.

Another aspect of Dr. Varma's research involves experimental studies on mice through which he hopes to learn more about MIC's effects on pregnancy.

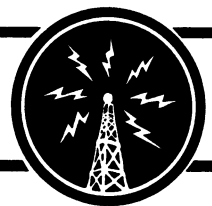
He reported his preliminary findings at a meeting on MIC sponsored by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

OSHA INVESTIGATES ITS NEW YORK OFFICE

Federal OSHA has announced that it is conducting an internal investigation of inspection and citation practices at its regional office in New York City. The investigation follows complaints that the office ignored mercury contamination problems at two local thermometer factories.

The Pymm Thermometer Company in Brooklyn was repeatedly granted extensions after it was ordered to reduce workers' mercury exposure. Elevated mercury levels had been found in some Pymm workers and their children. Another firm, the Ever Ready Thermometer Company, was also ordered to reduce exposure but the regional office closed the file on the case without verifying that the problem had been corrected.

OSHA also announced that it has removed the two top officials in the regional office. A reinspection at Ever Ready in February, 1986 led to 22 citations for violations which included lack of engineering controls, no respirator program, and allowing workers to eat in contaminated areas.



75th Anniversary

Labor Remembers the Triangle Fire

New York City unionists commemorated the 75th anniversary of the worst industrial tragedy in the city's history at a noontime ceremony near Washington Square on March 25, 1986.

Political leaders and more than a thousand union members participated in the memorial service, sponsored by the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union. The service was held at a ten-story building, built of stone and brick, at Greene St. and Washington Place. In 1911 this structure, then known as the Ashe Building, housed the Triangle Shirtwaist Company and was the scene of a disastrous fire which killed 146 workers. New York University owns the building today.

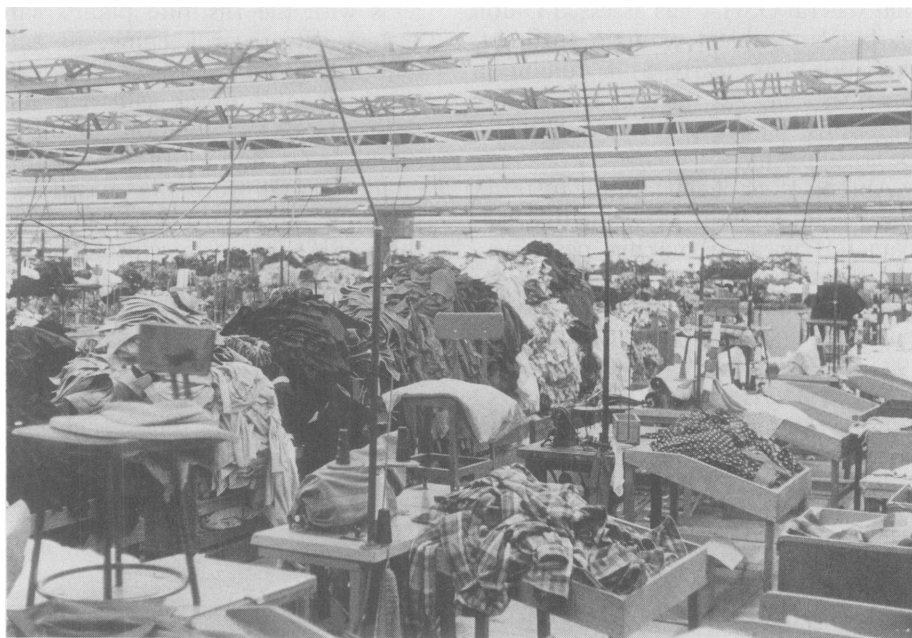
At least three survivors of the fire are known to be still living, all of them in their nineties.

The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire was a decisive event in labor history. It marked a turning point in the fight by labor unions and reformers to eliminate dangerous sweatshops and to obtain workplace safety legislation. Sweatshops like the Triangle factory had proliferated in late 19th- and early 20th-century American cities, but public horror over the 146 deaths on March 25, 1911 gave new impetus to a reform current which had also begun to develop. The fire likewise called public attention to the problems of the growing number of women workers in the U.S.

According to Sol Chaikin, president of the ILGWU, the Triangle commemoration was intended not to dwell on the past, but rather to honor the victims and to reflect upon the gains in worker safety and health which resulted from the fire.

NO EXIT

The Triangle company was the nation's largest manufacturer of "shirtwaist" cotton blouses, then a popular style. The fire began at about 4:30 pm on a Saturday afternoon, as the firm's



Textile workers today still face their share of health and safety hazards. (Photo courtesy of Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union.)

approximately 500 women employees were preparing to leave for the day. Most of the women were young Italian and Jewish immigrants, in their late teens and early twenties.

The workrooms were full of cloth scraps, which spread the fire quickly. In minutes, flames moved from the eighth floor where the fire started to the ninth and tenth floors.

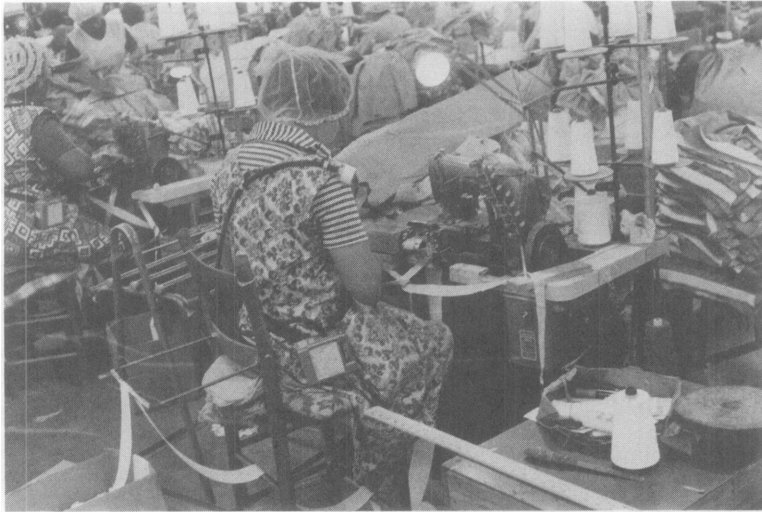
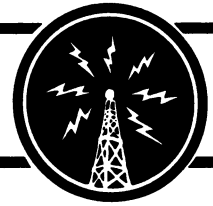
Contemporary press accounts describe the totally inadequate fire safety provisions in the building. There were only two staircases, and they were winding and narrow. The two elevators operated for a while, but were slow and inadequate. (Eventually the elevators stopped running, and some workers tried to climb down the elevator cables.) There were no sprinklers. The one fire escape collapsed when workers attempted to use it.

Doors opened inward, not outward, and so it was difficult to open them from inside. Many of the doors had

been locked by the company so that workers could be stopped and checked for theft when they left the building. When fire engines arrived, their ladders could not reach the upper stories of the building.

After the fire, the factory owners were tried for manslaughter, but were acquitted. Only a few of the dead workers' families received any compensation. But three months after the fire, the state legislature created a Factory Investigating Commission. Under public pressure, the Commission issued dozens of new industrial regulations, covering everything from fire safety to working hours.

Many worker protections taken for granted today originated in New York at that time. Equally important, the fire established the principle that, in the words of the Commission's chief counsel, "it is the duty of the state to safeguard the worker...against accidents which are extraordinary, but also against



(Photo courtesy of Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union.)

the incidents which are the ordinary occurrences of industrial life.”

SWEATSHOPS IN THE '80S

The Triangle anniversary has received considerable attention this spring in both the labor and mainstream media. One theme emphasized by many labor

spokespersons in the press has been that the basic safety regulations achieved at such a high cost in the early years of the century often remain unenforced today. For example, Jim Moran of PHILAPOSH wrote in the *New York Times* that “even in these times, locked fire doors are as common as hairs on a dog.”

Many have also pointed out that sweatshop labor is still very much a part of the U.S. economy. This spring, a *New York Times* reporter visited illegal textile operations in New York City (some close to the scene of the Triangle fire) and concluded that the sweatshop “is one of the...thriving features of the garment business in New York City.” There are hundreds of sweatshops in the city (and in many U.S. cities), paying below minimum wage or operating on piecework systems. Just as in 1911, most of the workers are young women who do not speak English.

Overseas competition puts pressure on domestic manufacturers to “squeeze wages and flout laws on working conditions,” according to a New York University economics professor. New York City officials say that these textile firms are among the most serious violators of building and sanitation codes, fire laws, health and safety regulations, and wage and hour standards. According to the *Times*, the firms often manufacture “high-fashion... clothing featured in the most expensive boutiques and showrooms” in the city.

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Clearinghouse



Household Workers' Group Offers Newsletter, Fact Sheet

Household Workers' Rights is a San Francisco organization that serves women employed in the home. Membership is open to anyone who agrees with the organization's purpose and goals, which include raising the wages, improving the working conditions, and changing the status of household workers.

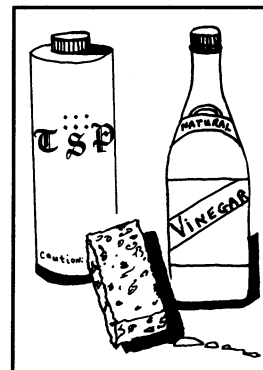
The group points out that household workers are among the lowest paid and most oppressed workers, facing problems which range from toxic cleaning chemicals to racketeer employment agencies. Most are women; the majority are women of color. There are millions employed at household work, and they are entitled to decent working conditions, dignity on the job, and a living wage.

Household Workers' Rights fights to strengthen legislation covering household employment, such as minimum wage laws and health and safety stan-

dards. It offers training and workshops on Health and Safety for Household Workers, Knowing Your Rights, Developing Contracts, and other topics; provides assistance to workers filing claims with the Labor Commissioner; and maintains an employment referral service.

The group's bimonthly newsletter, **Household Workers' Rights**, is bilingual (English and Spanish), and subscriptions are available for \$3. per year. The newsletter is also included with an annual membership, at \$5. per year. Regular meetings are held in the Bay Area. Volunteers and tax-deductible donations are always enthusiastically received. The address is: Household Workers' Rights, 330 Ellis St., San Francisco, CA 94102.

A new fact sheet, **Chart for Non-Toxic Cleaning**, is now also available from Household Workers' Rights. Either



From *Chart for Non-Toxic Cleaning*, Household Workers' Rights.

a Spanish or an English version may be purchased for \$2.00 (plus 35¢ sales tax and postage) from HWR. (See address above.)

The fact sheet grew out of a survey of the group's membership which found that the most serious health problems of household workers are caused by the toxic cleaning chemicals they use. According to the fact sheet, statistics from a recent study at the University of Oregon also show that the risk of cancer is twice as great for women who work in the home as for women who work outside the home. The study did not prove that household chemicals cause the higher cancer rate, but many household chemicals are known to contain cancer-causing agents. Other health problems caused by household chemicals range from skin rashes to allergies to immune system breakdown.

The fact sheet includes a useful chart which lists several dozen common cleaning products by type and by brand name. For each type of product, a brief description of the potential danger is given, along with a list of possible hazardous ingredients. (See sample in adjacent box.)

Another section of the **Chart for Non-Toxic Cleaning** lists safer alternatives for each type of cleaning product. Formulas are given for mixing relatively safe cleaners of several types, using such ingredients as soap, washing soda, Borax, and trisodium phosphate. While some of these may be irritants, their effects do not compare with the dangers of most commercial cleaning products.

A FEW CLEANING PRODUCTS AND THEIR HAZARDS

(a sample from HWR's *Chart for Non-Toxic Cleaning*)

TYPE OF CLEANER & EXAMPLES OF BRANDS	PRODUCT DANGER/ WARNINGS	MAY CONTAIN THESE CHEMICALS
Air Freshener (Wizard, Brocade, Airwick)	Interferes with ability to smell with nerve-deadening agent; cover exposed foods when spraying.	Formaldehyde, ethanol, phenol.
Carpet Shampoo (Woolite, Spray & Vac, Bissell)	Skin and eye irritant.	Sulfonated or phosphorated hydrocarbons.
Disinfectant (Lysol, Pine-Sol, Pine-Power)	Chronic poisoning from inhaling; keep away from heat, sparks, flame; avoid contact with food.	Cresol, phenol, ethanol, quaternary ammonium compounds.
Drain Cleaner (Drano, Liquid Plumber)	Corrosive; severe eye and skin damage; may cause blindness.	10% Sodium hydroxide (lye), trichloroethane, sodium nitrate.
Glass Cleaner (Windex, White Magic, Glass Plus)	Harmful if swallowed; injurious to eyes and skin.	Ammonia, glycerin, naphthalene, 10% isopropanol.

Health and Safety Videotapes from LOHP

Two of LOHP's feature films on health and safety are now offered as videotapes. The tapes are available in VHS, Beta, and U-matic formats. Prices are considerably below those charged for the original versions of these shows, which were 16mm. color sound films. However, the original versions are also still available. Order from the address at the bottom of the page.

Working For Your Life

(\$100, including postage and handling)

This film is a tribute to today's 43 million American working women. Their occupations may not appear hazardous, but beauticians use hair dyes that may cause cancer, while women in agricultural work can suffer pesticide exposure. Women in workplaces ranging from offices to smelters also face hazards, and many are fighting to improve conditions.

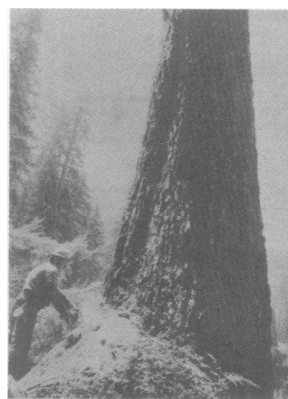


Directed by Andrea Hricko and Ken Light for LOHP in 1979. 57 minute color videotape. (Also available as a 16 mm. color film at \$600.).

Another Day's Living

(\$100, including postage and handling)

The hazards of life in the old logging camps are just a bitter memory. Gone are the killer river drives and log jams that swept whole crews to their deaths. But today's loggers and millworkers are still faced with health and safety hazards. This film looks at the life of the woodworker both yesterday and today.



Co-produced by LOHP, the International Woodworkers of America, and filmmaker Charles West in 1980. 30 minute color videotape. (Also available as a 16mm. color film at \$400.)

Order from: LOHP, 2521 Channing Way, Berkeley, CA 94720

Please specify format. Enclose prepayment. Make checks payable to: The Regents of U.C. Allow 60 days.

Write for a free catalog of all LOHP publications and audiovisual materials.

NLRA May Protect Individual Complaints

In February, 1985, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit issued a decision which may significantly broaden protection for workers who complain about health and safety hazards.

In *Meyers Industries*, the Appeals Court overturned an earlier ruling by the National Labor Relations Board in a 2-to-1 vote.

A truck driver at the Michigan firm, which manufactures aluminum boats, was fired after he complained to state safety officials about what he considered an unsafe tractor-trailer rig. He also refused to drive the rig. After the firing, the worker filed a complaint

with the NLRB. However, the NLRB upheld the dismissal.

The NLRB said that, although the National Labor Relations Act protects "concerted activity" among workers and prohibits retaliation for engaging in it, the actions of the truck driver at Meyers did not constitute "concerted activity" because he had not involved other workers in them. According to the NLRB, an employee's action can be considered "concerted" only if "engaged in, with, or on the authority of the other employees, and not solely by or on behalf of" the single individual who takes the action.

The Appeals Court rejected this

definition of "concerted activity" as too narrow. The Court majority pointed out that the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 1975 case, found that under some circumstances a single worker's actions could qualify as "concerted activity." In that case, *Alleluia Cushion Co.*, the Supreme Court found that the worker's complaints about health and safety conditions had the implied support of others and could benefit others.

The *Meyers Industries* case will be reconsidered by the NLRB in accordance with the Appeals Court directive. The case could ultimately reach the Supreme Court.

Federal District Court Upholds Akron "Right to Know" Law

A city "right to know" ordinance in Akron, Ohio was upheld in February by a U.S. District Court judge who ruled that the city is free to impose stricter requirements than those in federal OSHA's Hazard Communication standard.

Akron's "right to know" law was passed in late 1984 through the efforts of the local AFL-CIO Central Labor Council, the Rubber Workers, and the Chemical Workers. Like many other such laws, it requires employers to notify workers and city health officials of the presence of toxic chemicals in the workplace, to label containers, to supply material safety data sheets, and to train workers in safe handling.

The Ohio Manufacturers Association

and others filed suit to block the ordinance, claiming in part that the new federal "right to know" regulation (OSHA's Hazard Communication standard) preempts local laws on the same subject. The trade group's attorneys argued that the purpose of the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act is to provide "healthy work environments in a uniform way with minimum burden on interstate commerce." A similar argument was successful last year in the Third Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, where portions of New Jersey's Worker and Community Right to Know Act were struck down. Since that time, the courts have likewise ruled that parts of Pennsylvania's state "right to know" law are also preempted by the federal

standard.

The Akron case was different in that it considered whether OSHA's standard can preempt a municipal (rather than state) law. While OSHA has rules which specify that it must approve state attempts to regulate "right to know" and other safety and health matters, it has no such rules which mention cities.

Federal Judge Ann Aldrich upheld Akron's law, finding that OSHA "sets a federal floor on occupational health and safety... A municipality's freedom to also promulgate higher standards would not undercut that floor, but would support the policy of creating safer workplaces."

—AFL-CIO News

Suburban Bank Workers' Illness Puzzles Experts

On three separate occasions within two weeks this spring, office workers at Wells Fargo Bank's credit card processing division in the Bay Area suburb of Concord, California became ill in large numbers on the job. Health authorities have been unable to identify the cause of their illness. Several dozen workers were taken to hospitals for treatment.

The twin office buildings which house the bank's credit card division opened

only recently. Studies have shown increased worker illnesses in buildings of this type, and the phenomenon has been termed "tight building syndrome." Because such buildings rely upon mechanical ventilation for nearly all airflow, interior air can become stagnant, and the problem can be aggravated by gases seeping from varnish, paint, and synthetic materials used in construction and furnishings.

In one episode at the Concord complex, more than 500 workers were forced to flee one building when several became nauseated from a strong solvent-like odor.

Health investigators have installed air monitoring devices throughout the complex, and an engineering firm has been hired to study the heating and ventilation systems.

**Labor Occupational Health Program
Institute of Industrial Relations
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Berkeley, CA 94720**

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