

Reporter

August 1988.

no.
Number 243

HAZARDOUS WASTE WORKERS: IN NEED OF TRAINING

by Gina Gargano

California, home of the world's eighth largest economy, has been dependent on the production and use of chemicals for its growth and prosperity over the last forty years. The state's chemical-intensive industries employ one of every two Californians who work in manufacturing, and supply almost 30% of the state's corporate income.

The Price We Pay

Yet this growth and economic development has not been without a price: the costs of dealing with existing toxic contamination in California at an estimated 5,000 sites will total more than \$40 billion over the next decade. Thousands of these sites have been identified as posing a serious threat to public health and the environment, and are now designated for government action.

California ranks third in the nation as a generator of hazardous waste, behind only New Jersey and Texas. A conservative estimate puts California hazardous waste production at 10 million tons per year, excluding waste generated by small operators. In addition, it is estimated that 11 million tons of hazardous materials are treated, stored, and/or disposed of each year in the San Francisco-Bay Area alone. California is also on the EPA's National Priority List of the 10 states in the country with the largest numbers of hazardous waste sites.

Several hundred million dollars have already been allocated by state and federal agencies for clean-up, and millions more have been spent by companies identified as "responsible parties."

Soon, thousands of workers will be hired by new and expanding firms in the state to work on cleaning up hazardous waste sites.

Training the Workers

Various organizations across the country have been awarded eleven grants to begin hazardous waste worker training programs. Congress appropriated \$10 million for worker health and safety training in the Superfund Amended Reauthorization Act (SARA). The California Consortium is one group that has been awarded a training grant. Members of the Consortium, headed by the Labor Occupational Safety and Health Program (LOSH) at UCLA, include the Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP) at the University of California at Berkeley, the Los Angeles Committee on Occupational Safety and Health (LACOSH), and programs on the University of California, Davis and Irvine campuses and at the University of Southern California.

The California Consortium will develop curricula and training programs for an estimated 25,000 hazardous waste workers in California, including on-site clean-up workers; emergency response personnel; state and local agency staff responsible for site assessment; and workers at treatment, storage, and disposal sites. The Consortium expects to train 7,500 workers in five years. Federal OSHA recently issued new training standards for workers who handle hazardous wastes. The California Consortium curriculum will fulfill the new training requirements.

Gail Bateson is the program coordinator for the Northern California contingent of the Consortium at the Labor Occupational Health Program at U.C. Berkeley. Before coming to LOHP, Gail worked at the Occupational Health branch of the Department of Health Services, with the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, and with several statewide toxics groups. She brings a varied background and wealth of knowledge to the hazardous waste training program. Following are Gail's responses to my questions about the new training program:

What is the new OSHA training standard, who does it cover and who is eligible for training?

Right now there is an OSHA final interim rule, and the final standard is not expected out until the Fall of 1988. The OSHA hazardous waste standard which has a training element covers three major categories of workers.

Institute of Industrial Relations 2521 Channing Way, Rm. 300, Berkeley, CA 94720
University of California at Berkeley

SEP 15 1988
(415) 642-0323

INSTITUTE OF INDUSTRIAL
RELATIONS LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
BERKELEY

(1) Workers at federal superfund sites, state superfund sites, or sites designated by EPA for major corrective actions (under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act) need 40 hours training plus three days on-the-job training before they can start work, and we're providing the 40-hour training;

(2) Workers at treatment and storage and disposal (TSD) facilities regulated by EPA are required to have 24 hours training initially, and then an eight-hour per year refresher course;

(3) Workers who respond in emergencies to spills both on- and off-site are currently required to train for 24 hours per year, but we think that might change under the final OSHA standard.

For workers in each of these categories, the standard spells out different levels of training and different types of information that need to be covered.

What are your goals for the program?

Basically, we want to train workers in the hazardous waste field to recognize the hazards that they are facing, not only to learn ways to work more safely but also to learn more about their rights on the job. The OSHA standard is very broad and it covers thousands of workers. One of our jobs is to prioritize, and we are considering three target groups we want to reach: The first group is the unionized working population at hazardous waste sites. It is their labor organizations which help to make our programs possible. The second group consists of public sector workers, primarily those at the city and county level who are involved in monitoring and investigating hazardous waste sites. Because we have a substantial grant from the federal government and we can offer our courses at a subsidized rate, we think it is important to provide relatively inexpensive training to agencies that can't otherwise afford it.

The third group we're trying to reach is the growing population of minority workers at hazardous waste sites, including those with English as a second language who have been hired by subcontractors.

What is the California Consortium's approach to training?

Our approach not only covers the technical information workers need to do their jobs safely, but also teaches workers about the skills required and the rights they have. We emphasize participatory types of learning in the classroom. We're really trying to stay away from the straight lecture approach that most of the hazardous waste courses have used.

What is the time frame for your hazardous waste training program?

We have a five-year training grant and in our first year, we focus on training people in doing off-site emergency response work, primarily people in fire departments, some local environ-

mental health people, and some law enforcement personnel. Next year, we hope to start training workers at TSD facilities, and then move into training hazardous waste clean-up workers in the third year of the grant. Each year we're bringing a new course into the program.

What will be taught in the courses? Can you give me an example of the content for a course for TSD workers?

The standard for TSD sites is very vague at this point. The primary requirement is that training must be in accordance with the hazard communication standard, or the right-to-know law. In addition, we will be teaching people about proper selection and use of personal protective equipment, other control measures to minimize their exposures on the job, rights under the various laws, safe work practices, medical surveillance, and an overview of health effects that they may encounter on the job.

Who teaches these courses and what are their qualifications?

We will use a core group of instructors who we will retain as consultants, as well as staff members at LOHP, who are primarily health educators. In addition, we will use industrial hygienists and people with backgrounds in toxicology and medicine. We're hoping to find people with actual working experience in these industries. We want to work with rank-and-file trainers too.

What does it cost to take one of these courses?

Our fee structure throughout the California Consortium is set for public sector workers at \$25 per trainee per day, and for private sector workers at \$50 per trainee per day.

Where are these courses going to be taught?

The courses will be offered throughout central and northern California for our part of the Consortium. Northern California's jurisdiction (for LOHP at Berkeley and U.C. at Davis) extends down to Kern County. Courses in Southern California will be coordinated through the Labor Occupational Safety and Health Program at UCLA. We'll be offering courses primarily in the major cities, such as Bakersfield, Fresno, Sacramento, Redding, Eureka, throughout the Bay Area, and maybe down in Monterey. The best way to learn about our courses is to write us and find out where and when our courses are offered. If unions are interested in setting up a class, they should call us. We will work with them in setting up a course for a specific group of workers and at a location that is most convenient for them.

For more information, contact:

In Northern California: Gale Bateson (415) 642-5507
In Southern California: UCLA-LOSH (213) 825-3877

This article does not necessarily represent the opinion of the Center for Labor Research and Education, the Institute of Industrial Relations, or the University of California. The author is solely responsible for its contents. Labor organizations and their press associates are encouraged to reproduce any LCR articles for further distribution.