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LABOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PROGRAM

University of California, (Berkeley) Institute of Industrial Relations
Center for Labor Research and Education. Labor Occupational Health Program.

The Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP) evolved from a health and safety planning effort by the Institute's Center for Labor Research and Education following the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act's passage in 1970.

LOHP has two goals - to help bridge the gap between scientific knowledge and its application to places of employment confronting workers with health and safety hazards, and to help employees and their union representatives carry out their own health and safety programs.

The Ford Foundation provides LOHP with significant financial support. Staff members recruited in July 1974 included: Donald Whorton, M.D., Program Director; a board-certified specialist in both occupational medicine and internal medicine; Morris Davis, J.D., M.P.H., Associate Director and Editor of the Program newsletter, Monitor; Robert Fowler, Labor Coordinator and former chairman of the health and safety committee of IAM Local #1781; and Gene Darling, secretary and Chief Steward of AFSCME Local 1695. After contributing to the program's development, Bruce Poyer has remained a liaison between LOHP and other Labor Center activities.

In Fall 1975, with additional federal OSHA funds for an apprenticeship training project, four other staff members were added. Andrea Hricko, M.P.H., Health Coordinator, previously conducted studies on occupational health problems for Ralph Nader's Health Research Group in Washington, D.C. Janet Bertinuson, M.S. in Environmental Health and Industrial Hygiene, Coordinator for the Apprenticeship Project, conducted education and training programs for the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union in Denver, Colorado. Sidney Weinstein, writer and editor, has done freelance writing and editing around the Bay Area. Lydia Vrsalovic, a native of Chile, provides additional secretarial and translation support.

Education and Training

During its first year, LOHP placed primary emphasis on education programs focusing on two objectives: (1) to deliver information on health and safety issues to unions and employees, and (2) to enable employee groups to develop their own follow-up programs for identifying and controlling health hazards and to relate these programs to existing government programs and the collective bargaining process.

These educational activities have sorted themselves out into two main categories, general and specific. General programs are designed to reach workers who come together from different industrial jurisdictions. For example, one- and two-day institutes or seminars were held for labor representatives affiliated with the San Francisco and San Mateo County Central Labor Councils and for the California Labor Federation. The conference for the Labor Federation featured a 50-minute film, produced by LOHP and dealing with California Occupational Safety and Health inspection procedures and the rights and responsibilities of employees and employers under CAL/OSHA. Other general programs included an eighteen-week course in Occupational Health and Safety for workers in the Labor and Urban Studies Program at San Francisco City College and participation in a ten-session course sponsored by the Bay Area Committee on Occupational Safety and Health.

Specific health hazard information designed for workers in specific occupations or work jurisdictions was offered to federal shipyard workers, molders and boilermakers, cannery and food processing workers, machinists, auto mechanics, firefighters, warehousemen, airline employees, and carpet, linoleum and tile setters. LOHP also presented programs relating to specific workplace problems for three building trades institutes, two conferences of business representatives in the Service Employees Union, and a shop steward conference of the Printing Specialties in the East Bay.

Educational Materials

Extending its impact beyond the classroom, LOHP concentrated on gathering and distributing materials designed to raise the health and safety consciousness of workers and their shop level representatives. Its bi-monthly publication, Monitor, combines the journalistic features of the newsletter with some of the scholarly characteristics of an academic journal. Monitor now goes to about 1,000 local unions in Northern California. Each issue offers an update of LOHP activities and projects, reports on important current problems in worker health and safety, and discusses health problems affecting workers in a specific occupation, trade or industry. Examples during Monitor's first year included analyses of worker exposure to vinyl chloride and polyvinyl chloride, sulfur dioxide, asbestos, carbon monoxide, and phosphine gas; a discussion of occupational/environmental cancers, respiratory diseases, and occupational dermatosis; and a summary of the special hazards confronting firefighters.

Besides producing Monitor LOHP printed and distributed more than 12,000 copies of Rights and Responsibilities of Employees Under CAL/ OSHA, a pamphlet developed last year (see 1973-74 Annual Report). The project also published the LOHP Guidebook, which explains how workers can organize for health and safety and how they can utilize available resources to help them eliminate conditions which make their jobs unsafe or unhealthy. More than 500 copies of the Guidebook were distributed to workers and to union representatives - particularly to members of health and safety committees. In joint sponsorship with the Machinists and Longshoremen's Unions, LOHP issued Report on the Maritime Industry, which has since been utilized in the legislative campaign to correct glaring coverage and enforcement problems that have plagued this industry since the passage of federal OSHA.

LOHP's previously mentioned film on CAL/ OSHA was used in a number of educational programs and was shown on a 30-minute television program on KQED (Channel 9, San Francisco). The program illustrated common occupationally related illnesses and injuries in a variety of workplaces and explained how workers can reduce these daily casualties.

Finally, LOHP continues to gather, analyze, and distribute to workers, through its educational programs and through Monitor, statistical data on occupational injuries, diseases, and disabilities, and the most current descriptive information available on major efforts to control these workplace casualties, including the development of negotiated collective bargaining programs and the evolution of government programs.

Technical Assistance

LOHP's educational approach is complemented by a technical assistance component aimed toward clarifying scientific material. This was an important first-year activity, even though education itself was the main priority. Examples of this important follow-up to basic education and training functions include: a cooperative effort with the Coalition of Airline Unions at San Francisco International Airport; offering of technical advice on the control of specific health hazards confronting auto mechanics, truck

drivers, and carpet-linoleum-tile workers; and assistance to a coalition of firefighting organizations seeking to develop a new CAL-OSHA health and safety order which would raise previous standards and be specifically applicable to firefighters.

In its second year, LOHP will give extra emphasis to this technical assistance function. The focus will be on the identification of health hazards which affect large numbers of workers and a number of work jurisdictions and occupations. Comprehensive health hazard profiles will be developed for specific jurisdictions: educational efforts to develop technical assistance and control possibilities will then be directed to these areas.

Apprenticeship Training

There is an exceptionally high incidence of occupational injury and disease among younger workers in many of California's fifty apprenticeable trades. To help alleviate this condition LOHP has begun a one-year project to develop new approaches to apprentice training in the health and safety area. This new program, which is supported by a grant from federal OSHA, has been designed with the cooperation of the California Apprenticeship Council, and will include three aspects:

1. The development, for a specific building trade, of a health and safety curriculum which will be integrated into actual worksite training.
2. A similar project for an industrial or metal trade.
3. A workshop for instructors of apprentices in one of the above target trades, designed to demonstrate how this trade's curriculum can be taught.

In addition, LOHP will develop an outline of recommended health and safety topics to be covered in apprenticeship training programs generally, including reference and teaching materials which identify the health hazards associated with specific apprenticeable trades. Arrangements will be made for distribution of these materials to Joint Apprenticeship Committees, teachers of apprentices, coordinators of apprentice training, and health and safety committee representatives in the apprentice trades in California. At the end of the program, recommendations will be made concerning ways of improving on-the-job health and safety training.

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