

WOHRC NEWS

WOMEN'S OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH RESOURCE CENTER

Unions Win Right To Know About Hazards

NLRB rules that employers must furnish information about workplace toxins.

In a decision that significantly affects workers' rights to know about hazardous workplace substances, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled this spring that companies must give unions access to certain information about such substances. It also ruled that unions are entitled to receive medical information about employees, although they may not obtain individually identified employee records.

The Board ruled that companies must turn over to unions a list of the generic names of substances to which employees are exposed so long as no trade secrets, are involved. In the case of secrets, the parties were given the opportunity to negotiate the question.

The NLRB ruling was made in resolving three cases brought before it by the Oil, Chemical & Atomic Workers (OCAW) International Union and the International Chemical Workers Union (ICWU). Locals of the unions had requested such information from branches of 3M Company, Colgate-Palmolive and Borden. In refusing to release the data, said the NLRB, the three companies were guilty of unfair labor practices.

The unions had sought the information after a discovery in 1977 that a pesticide manufactured in California by a company not involved in these cases allegedly caused sterility in male workers.

"Few matters," the NLRB said, "can be of greater legitimate concern to individuals in the workplace, and thus to the bargaining agent representing them, than exposure to working conditions potentially threatening their health, well-being or their very lives."

In commenting on the ruling, George H.R. Taylor, director of occupational health and safety for the AFL-CIO, said

that the union was "very happy with the decision." He expected it to broaden the scope of a proposed Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) right to know standard which would include only chemicals used by the chemical industry itself, rather than with those used in construction, manufacturing and other industries.

Taylor indicated, however, that the union would like to extend workers' right to know even further to cover labeling of substances workers use and other direct communications on the job.

He also disagreed with the section of the ruling that restricts information involving companies' trade secrets, and

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NURSE

Nurses who smoke find their jobs more stressful and dissatisfying than nurses who don't, says a new study. (Page 2.)



SPERM COUNT



At least 15 percent of the most frequently used prescription drugs have adverse effects on male reproductive capacity, according to a recent article in the magazine, *Drug Therapy*.

"This is a minimum estimate," say the authors, Dr. Lester F. Soyka, director of clinical pharmacology at Mead Johnson Laboratories, and Dr. Donald R. Mattison, medical officer with the U.S. Public Health Service, National Institutes of Health.

In their study of the 200 most commonly prescribed drugs, five adverse effects on male reproduction were reported: changes in libido, impotence, gynecomastia (swelling of male breasts), testicular swelling and inability to ejaculate.

The authors noted that in pack-

age inserts that discussed some of these reactions, none were linked to infertility — although that would inevitably follow from impotence or inability to ejaculate.

Among the 16 drugs that cause impotence, they listed methyldopa (Aldomet), spironolactone (Aldactone) and reserpine/chlorthalidone (Regroton). The three that cause inability to ejaculate were listed as thioridazine (Mellaril), prochlorperazine and trifluoperazine (Stelazine).

The article and the complete list can be found in the August 1981 *Drug Therapy*.

This box contains periodic reports showing that toxic chemicals in the workplace and environment affect male as well as female reproductive capacity. Contributions from readers are welcome.

Stress Linked to Smoking in Nurses

A recent study of stress and smoking in hospital nurses shows that a significantly larger number of nurses who smoke compared to non-smokers find their jobs physically and emotionally stressful as well as dissatisfying in its rewards.

The study, conducted at the University of Michigan Hospital, found that smoking was associated more with the stresses of the work itself than with stress caused by the changing role of nurses or nurse-doctor conflict.

The study was conducted against a background of sharply increased smoking among U.S. women, particularly professional women, and a much lower quit-rate by female than male smokers. Seventy-seven percent of the smoking nurses in the study had tried to quit.

However, the researchers found that there is a trend toward smoking fewer cigarettes a day than had been reported in surveys taken only a few years ago, and that there was more smoking of low-tar cigarettes. Their data does not cover nurses outside of this particular hospital, they emphasized.

The survey was conducted among 900 patient care nurses at the University hospital by Dr. Renata Tagliacozzo and Sally Vaughn, M.A., of the University of Michigan Mental Health Research Institute. Their findings were published in the *May American Journal of Public Health*.

The researchers warned against thinking of the relationship between smoking and stress as simple cause and effect. "After all," they note, "the majority of nurses started working in the stressful situation at an age when their smoking was already an established habit."

Nurses who are more likely to perceive their jobs as stressful and who smoke tend to be under 29 years of age, single, have a BSN degree, work 40 or more hours per week and to work on rotating shifts.

Of the nurses who did relate their stress and smoking to changing roles, a significant number worked rotating shifts. Younger nurses were found to predominate here.

An article on the increased cancer rate in women in an American Cancer Society journal last year also noted that women professionals tend to smoke more and quit less than men in similar income and educational levels. Written by Drs. Jeanne and Steven Stellman, the article suggested that the increased stress placed upon women by their "dual role as homemaker and income producer and to dissatisfaction with lower-paying, less satisfying jobs" may lead to higher smoking rates. □

Genetic Screening Study Under Way

The controversial practice of genetic screening of workers in hazardous industries has become the subject of a comprehensive study by the U.S. Office of Technology Assessment.

OTA is an agency of Congress, created in 1972 to advise it on the uses of technology. The study was requested by the House Committee on Science and Technology which held hearings on genetic screening last fall.

WOHRC director Dr. Jeanne Stellman, a witness at the hearings, told committee members at that time that genetic screening, which focuses on workers' susceptibility rather than on environmental toxins, "turns public health policy on its head." Unions have charged that chromosomal tests of job applicants might be used to deny jobs to those thought genetically susceptible to workplace hazards even when there is no scientific proof of special susceptibility. (For a complete discussion see WOHRC News November/December 1981.)

The OTA report will focus primarily

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Right to Know continued from page 1

said that OCAW and ICWU had already asked the U.S. Court of Appeals "for review and correction of this error."

Under the present OSHA standard adopted in 1980 unions and workers have the right to examine and copy records of environmental air sampling, noise level monitoring, biological monitoring and material included on Material Safety Data Sheets.

OSHA is still studying the ruling.

Right To Know Help Offered

The Delaware Valley Toxics Coalition (DVTC) which led the campaign for Philadelphia's landmark right to know ordinance is offering its information and expertise to other interested communities.

The DVTC campaign in 1980 made Philadelphia the first place in the country where both workers and residents have the right to know the names of toxics used, manufactured, stored or released into the air. (See WOHRC News January/February 1981.)

It has already provided information and advice to more than 100 organizations and government officials throughout the country, including the Governor's Office of California.


The organization will make available, for \$3, a copy of the Philadelphia legislation, the accompanying regulations, relevant clippings and campaign materials.

In some cases, it can also provide onsite consultations and speakers for conferences and workshops. It is also drafting a right to know manual which will be available for a small fee within the next few months.

At least six states have passed right to know laws, with Wisconsin being the latest this spring. In addition to Philadelphia, Cincinnati, San Diego and several other California municipalities have passed local legislation.

For further information write to Caron Chess, Executive Director, Delaware Valley Toxics Coalition Educational Fund, 1315 Walnut, 16th floor, Philadelphia, Pa. 19107 or call (215) 736-7200.

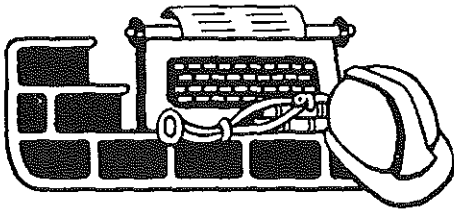
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(Subscription information on page 6.)



FACT SHEET:

Personal Protective Equipment

One of the problems that confronts women in both traditional and nontraditional jobs is the lack of protective clothing and equipment made in their sizes. Work clothes and equipment are too rarely designed and manufactured with women in mind. Most are made for the average size man.

As women have moved into formerly all-male occupations, the problem has been dramatized. Women find themselves wearing gloves that are too large and may catch in machinery, too-long boots whose protective steel toes begin only after the wearer's toes end, ill-fitting respirators that fail to keep out dangerous fumes, and hard hats that slip off and leave the head unprotected.

Equipment like this not only fails in its purpose but can actually cause accidents. The Coal Employment Project, an organization concerned with women in mining, reported hearing of a woman who lost a hand when her too-large glove caught in a machine.

Hazards for traditional jobs

Less obvious, but just as real, are the hazards for women in female-intensive jobs. Properly fitting gloves and respirators are needed to protect hospital laboratory technicians from toxic chemicals and infectious tissue specimens. Gloves, respirators and even protective shoes are needed by some women in arts and crafts jobs. Women who work in refrigerated areas, as in meatpacking plants, must have insulated gloves and thermal clothing, and meatpackers who work with knives wear chain mail gloves like the knights of old.

Sometimes inappropriate clothing may not be dangerous, but is simply aggravating. Women coal miners complain feelingly of having to wear men's coveralls which force a woman to undress completely when she has to go the bathroom. "Often," wrote one, "I'd have to take off a hard hat with a welding shield, gloves, tool belt, and safety belt in order to get down to my regular work pants. ...if you're also wearing overalls and have to unbuckle the bib or unzip and shrug off the top in the small space

of a porta-john with no place to put removed clothing or tools, it's especially frustrating."

In recent years, the work of organizations such as the Coal Employment Project and WOHRC itself has helped to enlighten manufacturers about women's



This welder's outfit includes items that all come in women's sizes. They are a leather bib apron, gloves, visor and the face shield held by the model.

needs. A recent WOHRC survey of 116 companies found that manufacturers of footwear, eye safety devices and gloves were the most responsive. However, for all protective clothing and equipment, fewer than half of the companies surveyed made items appropriate for women.

Even when they do, WOHRC found, there is another problem: Many workers and employers do not know where to order. Under OSHA regulations it is the employer who is responsible for issuing the protective clothing and equipment, and many workers simply accept what is provided.

Employers need to be educated so that

they will not order through companies that do not carry women's sizes; women workers need to be more informed so that they can insist on the equipment they really need or, if self-employed, buy it themselves. The survey discovered that almost half the companies contacted will sell by mail order to individuals as well as on a wholesale basis.

Following are the results of the survey:

Head and face protection. This is the least likely to be provided in female sizes. Only 14 percent of the companies surveyed made such items as hard hats, bump caps, welding helmets, hair protective devices, hoods, perspiration bands and hats with face shields in sizes that women can use.

However, some items such as hard hats and bump caps were found to have adjustable inside headbands which fit a wide range of head sizes. Many hard hats also had adjustable harnesses to ensure fit.

Still, many women are reported wearing men's hard hats which they must stuff with paper to prevent wobbling.

Safety goggles. About one-third of safety glass companies make women's sizes, but only a few goggle companies make sizes that women can use. Goggles, face shields and side shields that are too large can be especially dangerous because they can leave room for particles to fly in and injure the eye.

A Wisconsin Workers Compensation Accident Investigation made during the 1970s cited the case of a woman who suffered such an injury while she was cleaning her milling machine with a low-pressure air hose. Even though she wore safety goggles with side shields, they were so big that they slipped down her nose leaving her eyes partially unprotected.

Gloves. WOHRC found that gloves are one of the two items most frequently found in women's sizes. Still, only 50 percent of manufacturers provide them, and many companies fail to manufac-



An adjustable hard hat, ear muffs to screen out noise, safety glasses, latex gloves, a lightweight coverall and a NIOSH-approved respirator that filters out organic vapors are shown by a model at a WOHRC PPE "fashion show."

ture their full line in women's sizes. Too often women's sizes must be specially ordered, and employers, unaware of this, do not make them available.

Still another problem is the lack of information about materials needed to protect workers from specific chemicals. One recent study found that out of 28 protective gloves, not one offered complete protection against all of the 27 commonly used laboratory solvents tested.

Respirators. WOHRC found respirators the most striking example of the failure to provide personal protective equipment in women's sizes. This is especially significant in the face of OSHA's current policy to de-emphasize engineering controls of the environment in favor of the less expensive personal protective devices.

The WOHRC survey found available in sizes appropriate for women only 22 percent of air line respirators, which are the most effective since they carry fresh air to a wearer working in a contaminated area. Only 29 percent of respirators with mechanical filters come in appropriate sizes, and only 20 percent of those with chemical cartridges that filter out specific pollutants. No powered

air purifying respirators are available in sizes useful for women.

Improperly fitting respirators are particularly serious because their wearers often do not realize that they are not being adequately protected.

Tools and safety equipment. No hand tool companies were found that produce tools for woman-size hands. The wrong size tools can create undue pressure on vulnerable nerves and blood vessels, aggravating hand and wrist ailments such as tenosynovitis and carpal tunnel syndrome.

However, about a third of the companies manufacture safety belts useful for women, and more than 40 percent provide safety harnesses for women.

Body protection. About one-third to one-half of the manufacturers surveyed make coveralls and protective coats, pants, sleeves, vests, leggings and aprons in women's sizes.

To meet complaints such as those of the women miner above about coverall design, Kay Caddel of the Texas Tech Textile Research Center working under a contract from the U.S. Bureau of Mines, has developed a coverall which zips from knee to knee, so that it does not have to be taken off to go the bathroom. It also has a padded back area especially helpful to women miners who must bend over in low tunnels. The Center has also developed a sizing chart for women's work clothes.

Further information about these may be obtained from Jim Peay, Bureau of Mines, Cochran Mill Road, P.O. Box 18070, Pittsburgh, PA 15236.

Boots and shoes. Foot protection is one area in which manufacturers seem to have come closest to meeting women's needs. Almost 70 percent of those surveyed by WOHRC make steel-toed shoes in women's sizes and 75 percent make women's rubber boots. Far lesser numbers, however, make women's toe guards, knee pacs, shoe guards and other devices.

The problem with women's protective footwear has continued to be the lack of safety standards by which they can be judged. OSHA has adopted the standard set by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), but this was originally developed only for men. In 1976, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health found in a study of

women's safety shoes that, even using relaxed standards, "women's safety-toe shoes will not meet even the least stringent requirements of the men's safety-toe footwear standards."

In 1978, ANSI developed a standard for women's safety shoes, but this has not yet been adopted by OSHA. Some manufacturers, however, now advertise their women's work boots as being in compliance with one class or another of the ANSI standard.

The unmet need. Much needs to be done before women workers have full access to adequate personal protective equipment.

- More data is needed on women's body measurements so that clothing and equipment can be designed realistically.
- Women workers themselves need to be involved in the design of the clothes and equipment so that their desires and observations can be incorporated into the final product.
- More equipment must be manufactured based on these measurements and needs.
- Women workers and their employers need better channels to inform them of equipment that already exists.
- Improved standard setting and certification procedures need to be developed.
- Workers need to be better educated about the importance of personal protective equipment.

Even though the best way to deal with workplace hazards is to prevent them in the first place, P.P.E. will always remain an important secondary line of defense.

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Canadians Find Hazard in New Supermarket Process

A new Ring & Bag system of checkout in supermarkets is causing serious health problems for large numbers of cashiers, according to the Ontario Federation of Labor.

The system, now being used in Canada, has also been introduced in the United States. It combines into one process what were formerly two separate tasks: ringing up the grocery charges and putting the items in bags. Under the new process, the cashier punches the register or computer with her right hand while she bags with her left. This, as the union points out, "virtually ensures that the cashier will be slightly off balance during the entire checkout process.

"This necessitates a shift of body weight onto the left foot. This small difference in posture greatly increases fatigue during an eight-hour shift and gradually distorts the entire muscular system along the left side of the body."

In 1981 the union surveyed nearly a thousand full- and part-time cashiers who use the new system. It found that the off-balance posture plus the additional effort needed to lift heavier items with the left hand alone had disturbing biomechanical health effects.

"Eighty-two percent of all surveyed cashiers reported negative health changes since they began working on the Ring & Bag systems and over 20 percent experienced continuous or frequent pain and discomfort in one or more parts of their bodies," said the union report. "Back problems, caused by the repetitive bending to bag groceries, were cited by 62 percent of those surveyed, with neck and shoulder pains, caused by the one-handed lifting method, being registered by 44 percent. Arm and leg discomforts were mentioned by 40 percent and 38 percent of the respondents, respectively."

The report, published in the labor federation newsletter, *At the Source*, says that many cashiers have had to take time off from work to recover from this stress, but that many more continue working and take drugs or chiropractic therapy to relieve their pain.

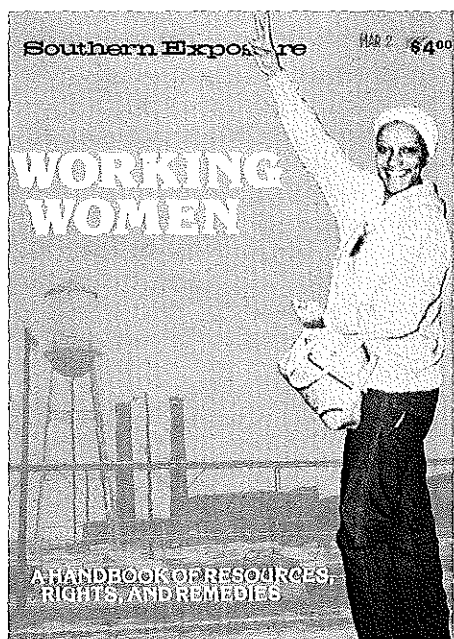
"Those who have applied for Workmen's Compensation are normally denied entitlement on the grounds that nothing

unusual or accidental has happened to cause the disability," reports the union. It has won every appeal filed on behalf of disabled cashiers, but the waiting time for this process is so long that some cashiers have resigned to look for less stressful work.

The United Food and Commercial Workers of Ontario is bringing the problem to the attention of supermarket companies, but expects no immediate action.

For further information write to the Ontario Federation of Labor Occupational Health and Safety Centre, 15 Gervais Drive, Suite 703, Don Mills, Ontario, Canada. □

PUBLICATIONS



Working Women, the Winter 1981 edition of Southern Exposure, edited by Tobi Lippin, Institute for Southern Studies, \$4.

This 128-page magazine issue is a small encyclopedia of the achievements, triumphs and problems experienced by Southern women workers. Its relevance is not limited to the South.

With many photographs, and often in the women's own words, it covers the issues confronted by workers in factories, offices, hospitals, classrooms, res-

taurants, farms and other people's kitchens. It also tells about the women pioneers in coal mines and construction jobs and the inspiring organizations that are helping them such as the Coal Employment Project and the Texas-based National Women's Education and Employment project which is oriented toward Hispanic women.

An article called "A Litany of Hazards" discusses the health and safety problems of women workers, particularly those in the new computerized offices where stress has become a major problem.

Other articles spell out the statistics, describe some of the history and tell of the modern union struggles. Each section comes complete with a list of resources: organizations (including WOHRG) and publications which can be of help to working women in both North and South.

What makes this magazine more than an encyclopedia, however, are the poems, songs and first-hand experiences of the women it talks about. There is even a chapter from a novel about Southern garment workers.

Working Women, which is Volume IX, No. 4, of *Southern Exposure*, can be ordered from the magazine at P.O. Box 531, Durham, North Carolina 27701. □

The New Pregnancy, by Susan S. Lichtenorf and Phyllis L. Gillis, Bantam Books, 1981, \$2.95.

The New Pregnancy is a forthright, sensible and sprightly-written book that discusses just about every issue faced by the modern pregnant woman.

Readers of this newsletter will be especially interested in the chapter, *At Work*, which includes a section on occupational safety and health.

"Occupational safety for the pregnant woman is a double-edged sword," the authors state frankly. They discuss the dilemma of the woman who may wish to transfer to a safer job during her pregnancy, but must also challenge the tendency of employers to try to bar her entirely or to shift her to a lower paying position.

As they do throughout, the authors interview informative experts, here including former Equal Employment Opportunity Commissioner Eleanor Holmes Norton, who describes occupational hazards as "one of the great frontier issues

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Acute Allergic Outbreak Traced to Wet-Process Photocopier

A Milwaukee clerical worker with no previous record of allergies has reported an acute allergic outbreak after being exposed to a wet-process photocopying machine.

From the very day of the installation of the machine in her office, she reports symptoms that have included rash and inflammation over most of her body, as well as a burning sensation in her eyes, fast heartbeat, congestion in the throat, nausea, fatigue and inability to concentrate.

A test at a Chicago clinic showed that she was allergic to an isoparaffinic hydrocarbon one of whose trade names is Isopar H. This chemical constitutes 99.6 percent of the photocopier's toner and 94.0 percent of its concentrate, and is known to cause allergic reactions in some people.

The worker reported that she has had no cooperation from her employer, although she has succeeded in changing her seating arrangement so that she is no longer near the copier and she avoids handling wet copy. A lawyer whom she hired to bring suit against the manufacturer of the machine attributed her condition to menopause, and she is now seeking a woman lawyer.

WOHRC would appreciate any further information on this subject from newsletter readers. Please write to us at the address on page 6.

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on the technology of the screening, according to a spokesperson for the agency. Practices of companies in the chemical, mining and pharmaceutical industries will be examined in the attempt to find out what kinds of tests are being used, their reliability and their validity. OTA will also consider the legal, economic and ethical aspects of the practice. The report is due in the fall.

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under Title VII." Practical advice comes from Sylvia Krekel, an occupational health specialist at the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, who says that a pregnant woman who finds that she is exposed at work to toxic substances "should ask to be transferred to a less hazardous position on a temporary basis, but with full economic protection, including maintenance of seniority and pay. This should be done with union backing."

Krekel then adds realistically, "Because this is a new issue, however, you may not get very far . . . You will, however, be bringing the issue to light."

In their appendix, the authors add a list of useful references including addresses of local EEOC and Occupational Safety and Health Administration offices, as well as the guidelines prepared by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health on work environment.

This thorough, useful and upbeat

approach is maintained throughout as the book discusses a wide range of pertinent subjects. The authors talk about taking charge of your own medical care so as to get the doctor and treatment you want, and how to tell your employer that you are pregnant when you still want to keep your job. They assume that the reader is interested in sports, travel, sex, her inner conflicts about her pregnancy, and how she will cope once the baby is born. Although they generally address the woman who has employment outside her home, they do not neglect the reader who may choose motherhood as a career.

"We have left the path of traditional pregnancy books for good reason," they say. "You are pregnant at a time of strong social change for women. The concept of pregnancy that we are offering is new and different from that of the past."

WOHRC in the News

The June issue of McCall's *Working Mother* contains an article on stress among office workers by WOHRC News editor Naomi Barko.

The article describes some of the latest discoveries about stress and work, particularly those of Dr. Marianne Frankenhauser of the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm and Dr. Robert A. Karasek of Columbia University who emphasize the stress caused by lack of control over work. WOHRC is mentioned in several places.

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