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Minority Workers and the Ongoing Struggle for Environmental Justice in the Workplace

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Introduction

- Sheila Fitzgerald introduces Andrea Kidd Taylor



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Section A

Overview

Environmental Justice in the Workplace

- Disproportionate numbers exposed to occupational hazards and the dirtiest, most dangerous jobs
- Black workers—coke ovens, textiles, foundries, meat processing (U.S. location)
- Native Americans—uranium mining (N.M.)
- Hispanics—agriculture (farms); construction
- Asians, Hispanics, Blacks (Afr)—sweatshops and microelectronics industry—repetitive strain injuries (RSIs)
- Unemployment (linked to blood pressure elevations, mental health problems, and excess morbidity and mortality)

Historical Perspective (African-American Workers)

- 1930s: Landmark silicosis disaster at the construction of Hawk's Nest Tunnel, Gauley Bridge, West Virginia (silica exposure)
- 1940s: Toxic and carcinogenic chromate dust exposures in the chromate industry
- 1950s: Carcinogenic aromatic hydrocarbon exposures among coke oven workers
- 1970s: Hazardous exposures in the textile and rubber industries

1991 Poultry Plant Fire

- 1991: Poultry Plant in Hamlet, North Carolina
 - Devastating fire, locked safety doors
 - 25 workers killed
 - ▶ 12 African Americans
 - ▶ 12 White Americans
 - ▶ 1 Native American

Dynamics Affecting Worker Health and Safety

- Two dynamics strongly impact worker health and safety
 1. Poor working conditions—little career mobility (education and health care access)
 2. The lack of access to work—unemployment
 - ▶ Current rates
 - African Americans: 10.2%
 - Latino Americans: 7.4%
 - White Americans: 5.1%

Farm Work

- One of the most dangerous occupations
- Seasonal workers: 71% Hispanic
- Migrant workers: 95% Hispanic
- Over 13% workplace fatalities in this industry are the result of pesticide toxicity: 1,000 deaths reported annually; 300,000 reported cases of illness

Farm Work: OSHA Regulations

- OSHA regulations
 - Require field sanitation facilities (toilets, drinking water, and hand washing facilities)
 - Cover toxic substance disclosure by requiring hazardous chemical lists, material safety data sheets (MSDSs), employee information and training
 - *Only enforced on farms that employ 11 or more workers (over 1 million workers are excluded)*

Farm Work: EPA Regulations

- EPA regulations
 - 1992: Worker Protection Standard for Agricultural Pesticides
 - ▶ Requires farmers to ...
 1. Provide written or oral information on the type of pesticide used on crops being harvested
 2. Provide PPE for each farm worker
 3. Restrict re-entry into fields after pesticide application

Farm Work: JHSA Study

- Florida study in the winter 2002 *Journal of the Health and Human Services Administration*
 - More than 50% of farm workers employed in California and Florida
 - 65% are employed in the production of vegetables, fruits, nuts, tobacco, or sugar—labor-intensive work requiring heavy pesticide application
 - Most are undercounted in the U.S. Census due to timing and the migration north in April
 - Florida farm workers are a mix of Haitians, Jamaicans, Latinos, and other (the majority are Hispanic)

Farm Work: JHSA Study

- Major health problems reported
 - High rates of skin disease
 - Spontaneous abortions
 - Still births
 - Low sperm count
 - Sterilization
 - Cancer
 - Neurological and behavioral disorders

Farm Work: JHSA Study

- Problems in policy and enforcement
 - Lack of reporting of pesticide-related illnesses
 - Lack of accurate data to reflect the number of workers injured due to pesticide poisoning
 - Lack of awareness of physicians regarding reporting requirements
 - Unfamiliarity regarding diagnosis and management of pesticide poisoning
 - OSHA—small farms operate without basic sanitation facilities
 - EPA—lack of compliance by farm owners (workers in vicinity of spraying, and improper use of PPE)

Construction Industry

- Fatalities increased 67% between 1992 and 2001
- Hispanics (Latinos) have a continuous growing participation
- Latinos represent 15% of the construction workforce (13% of the total U.S. population)
- Fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries are higher
- Non-fatal injuries and illnesses to Hispanic workers increased 7% from 2005 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006)

Construction Industry: Hazards

- Most frequent *fatal* accident categories
 1. Transportation incidents
 2. Contact (being struck) with objects and equipment
 3. Falls
 - ▶ Primary injury category: falls to a lower level
 - ▶ Comprise 37% of all Latino construction fatalities

Construction Industry: Hazards

- Most frequent *non-fatal* work injury: contact (being struck) with objects and equipment

Service Industry

- Where most jobs are being created
- Where workers of color are more likely to be employed
- Occupations pay relatively low wages
- Majority women
- Nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants: 49,480 days away from work due to non-fatal occupational injuries and illnesses—four times the total for all occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006)

Service Industry: JPHP Study

- San Francisco, California, study in the *Journal of Public Health Policy* (2002)
- Industry make-up
 - Room cleaners: 27% of the hotel industry
 - Food and beverage: 18%
 - Front desk clerks: 9%
 - Managers: 7%

Service Industry: JPHP Study

- Demographic (ethnic and gender) make-up
 - 99% of room cleaners are female
 - 31%: Filipinos
 - 35%: Asians
 - 28%: Latinos
 - English not the first language for 95% of the room cleaners participating in the study

Service Industry: JPHP Study

- Health and safety hazards identified (survey questionnaire and focus groups)
 1. Physical job demands
 - ▶ Increased garbage in rooms
 - ▶ Greater work to change linen
 - ▶ Little room to move around due to larger beds in same small spaces

Service Industry: JPHP Study

- Health and safety hazards identified (survey questionnaire and focus groups)
 1. Physical job demands
 - ▶ Increased garbage in rooms
 - ▶ Greater work to change linen
 - ▶ Little room to move around due to larger beds in same small spaces
 2. Constant time pressure (job stress)
 3. Lack of respect from supervisors
 4. Poor job security
 5. Poor job promotion prospects

- Health impacts
 - High rates of work-related pain and disability
 - ▶ Of the 77% of room cleaners reporting musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) work-related pain, only 50% reported the pain to their supervisors or management
 - ▶ Only 23% formally reported work-related injury



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Section B

Sweat Shops, Contingent Workers, and Unemployment

Sweat Shops

- Are labor intensive and violate both safety and health laws and child labor laws
- Most workers are Hispanics, Asians, African Americans, and individuals of African descent
- Hazards most frequently reported
 - RSIs
 - Overcrowding
 - Poor lighting
 - Abusive working conditions

“Contingent” Workforce

- Part-time, temporary, and contract employees
- Significantly increased in the past decade
- Corporate restructuring (downsizing, franchising, and outsourcing)
 - Many companies “re-engineered” workplaces
 - Shift to “lean production”—lowering labor costs (no benefits, health insurance, etc.)

“Contingent” Workforce

- Examples of outsourcing maintenance work
 - U.S. Petrochemical Industry
 - An indirect cause of several catastrophic explosions and hazardous exposures (CSB Reports)
 - ▶ Tosco Oil Refinery (California)
 - ▶ Equilon Refinery (Washington)
 - ▶ Motiva Enterprises (Delaware)
 - ▶ Georgia Pacific (Alabama)

“Contingent” Workforce

- Outsourcing on maintenance work
 - Non-English speaking workers
 - Increased fatalities and worker injuries

Unemployment

- Current rates
 - 5.1% for Whites
 - 10.2% for African Americans
 - 7.4% for Latinos
- Women have higher rates
- Health risks
 - Increased stress
 - Higher blood pressure
 - Heart disease
 - Adverse mental health

What Needs to Be Done

- Improve surveillance and research
- Reform OSHA
- Reform workers' compensation laws
- Preventive interventions (worker training and risk communication, community outreach)
- Minority recruitment
- Health care access
- Treatment and compensation

What Needs to Be Done

- Preventive interventions: Recommendations for Reducing Injuries & Fatalities among Non-English Speaking Workers*
 1. Provide safety and health training in a language appropriate to the population (when possible, have a native of the language conduct training)

What Needs to Be Done

- Preventive interventions: Recommendations for Reducing Injuries & Fatalities among Non-English Speaking Workers*
 1. Provide safety and health training in a language appropriate to the population (when possible, have a native of the language conduct training)
 2. Provide linguistically appropriate and relevant health and safety info and materials that address specific workplace hazards
 3. Maintain a low student-to-trainee ratio
 4. Training should be culturally sensitive
 5. Provide financial and other support to encourage non-English speaking workers to continue their education
 6. Conduct on-the-job safety meetings in the appropriate language of the workforce



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Section C

Q & A with Jacqueline Agnew

- How do you think we can reach employers?

- Can you tell me what some of the challenges are in education and training?

- What are some of the programs offered?

- Tell me about the injured/ill minority worker

- Issues related to nurse aides