

Sí Se: Salud y Seguridad en el Trabajo

Building Capacity for Health & Safety Education of Forest Workers



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Background

This project targets forest conservation workers, who do manual labor to develop, maintain, or protect forested areas, including planting trees, pest control, and thinning and cutting brush and small trees. Forest workers face many hazards on the job including falling trees and branches, chain saw injuries, falling while working on slippery, uneven terrain, heat stress, exposure to gasoline (skin contact and inhalation of fumes), vehicular accidents during transportation to and from the work site, musculoskeletal disorders due to carrying heavy loads for long hours, and many other dangers.

Although a few contractors provide safety training to their workers, most workers do not receive any training. Most workers do not know their rights. They are unaware of the laws entitling them to a safe work place and to medical care if they are injured. Many workers tell of delaying treatment for injuries on the job, and of tremendous difficulties in navigating the workers' compensation system. With current shifts in U.S. immigration policy, agencies in the Northwest are anticipating an increase in the number of forest workers on guestworker visas, who typically have the least understanding of workplace health and safety rights and responsibilities.



Methods (continued)

Training Material Development. Four meetings were held with workers and other community members to 1) identify key health and safety concerns; 2) seek input on the survey the Alliance was designing to interview forest workers about their work experience; 3) review initial survey results and what they indicated should be addressed in the promotora program; and 4) provide some initial feedback and input on draft training materials and activities. As a result, tabletop guides for four different 2-hour training workshops were developed, covering **workplace rights, outdoor hazards, chainsaw safety, and what to do if you are injured.** The workers we met with requested that any fact sheets produced be compiled as a booklet, so we also produced a 30-page booklet.

Promotora Training. Four women from the community—all wives of forest workers—were recruited to serve as promotoras. Two of the women participated from the beginning of the project, and worked with the Alliance to survey forest workers about their work experience (described in a separate poster authored by C. Wilmsen of AFWH.) These two women also participated in the community worker meetings described above. The four women participated in 30 hours of training over six days (two Th/Fri/Sat sessions). Training included basic education on being an effective promotora, provided by staff from Migrant Health Promotion** but focused primarily on demonstrations and practice with the table top guides. After the first 3-day worker training session, it became clear that the focus should at first be limited to one or two workshop topics. The remaining topics were saved for future training and practice in the fall.

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Project Objectives

The purpose of this project is to create and evaluate a pilot lay health advisor—or *promotora*—program targeting forest workers, many of whom are foreign-born guestworkers. The long-term goals of this project are to increase worker knowledge of their rights, train them in preventing on-the-job injuries and illnesses, and build their capacity to improve their own working conditions. This poster reports on the first year of the pilot project in which our objectives were to:

- 1) identify priority job safety issues,
- 2) develop educational materials about them, and
- 3) train the promotoras in using the educational materials in workshops for training workers.

Methods

Partnership: This *promotora* program is being developed as a pilot project for implementation in late 2011 and 2012 among forest workers in southern Oregon, through a partnership between the Alliance of Forest Workers and Harvesters (a worker, harvester and environmental advocacy organization), the Labor Occupational Health Program at the University of California, Berkeley, and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, with additional funding from an OSHA Susan B Harwood grant. Although *promotora* programs have been used successfully among farmworkers for thirty years or more, we know of no previous attempt to apply this model to the unique occupational hazards forest workers face or within their communities.

"He trabajado en la sierra por 30 años y nunca supe de un programa como este; tampoco supe que tenía derechos laborales." *
 --Trabajador Forestal



Lessons Learned:

Working with brand new educators: Presenting or playing any kind of role as an educator was brand new to all of the promotoras we worked with. While challenging in terms of the time and resources needed to be successful, the women have been enthusiastic about facing these challenges, and their new role as leaders in the community is already apparent.

Evaluation. Pre- and post-tests at the worker training sessions were planned but the low-literacy approach to this required strong facilitation skills on the part of the promotoras. After trying it at the first session, we determined that it was more important to focus on the educational materials until the promotoras attained more confidence in their leadership skills. Currently, we are relying on a simple post test and trainer assessments. A focus group with a sample of worker participants will be conducted 3-6 months after training as well.

Building a network: Engaging members of the community as educators and information resources is a culturally appropriate approach, and has already begun to contribute to building a network of support for forest workers in the Medford area. Husbands of the promotoras have been fully supportive (providing child care and practicing workshop activities with their wives), and many other forest worker wives and family members have participated in workshops and begun to seek out information from the promotoras.

Building capacity: Forest workers have such a low level of understanding of their health and safety rights and responsibilities that the promotora approach, while challenging, has a huge potential for spreading information and sharing workers' stories in the community—the first step towards training for action.

** I have worked in the forest for 30 years and never heard of anything like this program, nor did I know I had any labor rights." —Forest worker

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