# Enlaces de Seguridad: Overtaking Residential Construction!

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This truly amazing collaboration consists of: New Labor<sup>1</sup>, Rutgers Occupational Training and Education Consortium (OTEC)<sup>2</sup>, and University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ)<sup>3</sup>

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### Introduction and Background

tion to reduce risks while providing workers with general health and safety training may not provide the means to make changes. This project assesses the effectiveness of trained safety liaisons (enlaces de seguridad), recruited from Latino day laborers in residential construction in Newark, NJ, to communicate about safe work practices and improve workplace conditions.

#### Methods

New Labor, a "community union" worker center, is working with academic partners (Rutgers Occupational Training and Education Consortium/UMDNJ School of Public Health) and Laborers Local 55 to implement this five-year project. Key components include:

A five day train-the-trainer using a peer-based participatory methodology to cover OSHA 10 training, modules on conducting a residential safety audit, and activities to prepare liaisons to interact with supervisors and peers







- Additional training and leadership development through quarterly refresher training, weekly meetings, and phone contact
- Using safety audits to collect data on residential construction hazards
- Organizing a bi-weekly residential construction council ("consejo") including recruiting attendees, and leading meetings
- Attending and asking questions at meetings and public forums with OSHA and other officials
- Recruiting fellow workers for OSHA 10 trainings







# Progress

Through a series of quarterly meetings in conjunction with New Labor, Rutgers OTEC and UMDNJ staff, 17 members of New Labor and Laborers' Local 55 help to develop a safety audit that is succinct yet comprehensive enough to cover different aspects of residential construction. Audits are begun; however the residential construction slump has taken its toll as many of the participants are only working sporadically. Over time, safety liaisons are more comfortable completing audits and sharing the results.

26 workers have completed the safety liaison training and participated as safety liaisons. These trainings included activities to overcome the "black-brown" and "English-Spanish" divides.

# The Safety Liaisons' Experience in Timeline Form

Developing Safety Liaisons has been a process that takes time. In addition to acquiring knowledge on workplace health and safety norms and regulations it also involves a commitment to building organization and thinking strategically about how to confront workplace health and safety issues. Below is a snapshot of this experience, in timeline format.

#### Year 1: Creating Measurement Instruments and Training Program: EDUCATE

Sixteen participants participated in a 5-day "train-the-Trainer" course where participants learned technical workplace health and safety information as well as facilitation, teamwork and critical thinking skills. All activities designed by New Labor/Rutgers OTEC for the training continue to utilize the Small Group Activity Method (SGAM) as they have done so for over 10 years. Participants worked together in groups to tackle a real life based scenario that required them to read technical factsheets and use their own experience to solve the problem. Audits are begun; however the residential construction slump took its toll as many of the participants were only working sporadically

#### Year 2: Cultivating Relationships with OSHA and Building a Base: ORGANIZE

Safety Liaisons received technical information on hazards, but did not feel the confidence to be able to address issues with co-workers. Nor did they see themselves as a collective group with a safety liaison "identity". Based on a quarterly meeting, the liaisons organized an action because an employer did not want to provide hearing protection despite working with loud machinery. The liaisons created a noise factsheet and took earplugs to give out to jornaleros at the corner. After collectively deciding upon this action, the liaisons worked to form a "consejo" meeting to discuss similar worker health and safety issues

A "consejo" is a group of workers that are concerned about the conditions of work and want to collectively look for solutions to the problems they face. Liaisons inform participants of problems and violations and do outreach for the meetings. As a group they discuss effective ways of solving the problem with an agreed upon plan of action. The safety liaisons also assessed consejo participation and commitment from those that attended an OSHA 10 class that liaisons helped to facilitate. Their criteria was used to select the next group of nine safety liaisons to be trained.

Safety liaisons also requested a meeting with OSHA to develop a closer and more direct relationship. As a result of this meeting, a protocol was established for liaisons to report and file complaints with all four New Jersey area offices.

#### Beyond Year 2: El Consejo in Action: Fighting for Change: REALIZE

The liaisons are, for the most part, now working consistently. In addition, they have completed over 100 safety audits Continuing, they are leading consejo meetings twice a month that are regularly attended by 20 participants. At the meetings, two other themes emerge: specific skills training and unpaid wages. With the former, a scaffold building training was done in conjunction with OSHA, and Year 3 will include more focus four construction hazard training provided by a training grant to UMDNJ. With the latter, unfortunately, a contractor that is unscrupulous with health and safet conditions is often unscrupulous with wages and hours (wage theft). Actions are taken to recover unpaid wages. In all, we notice a strong commitment and growing confidence among first and second year safety liaisons. The section below, "Steps to Make Change", demonstrate strategies developed to create results.

## Audit Quantitative Results

Below are summary results of the first 51 health and safety audits. About 50% of these were performed from the sidewalk, and the other 50% were performed on the jobsite.

	Yes	Total Observed	% Yes 1
Hard Hats Supplied	11	29	38%
Boots Worn/Supplied	11	30	37%
Hearing Protection supplied	4	24	16%
Eye Protection Supplied	8	30	27%
Respiratory Protection Supplied	2	26	8%
Ladder Size Appropriate	17	23	74%
Extend > 3ft above edge	9	16	56%
Proper climbing procedures	14	22	64%
Stand below top 2 steps	9	17	53%
Scaffolds with fall protection	7	24	29%
Level, stable base observed	19	29	66%
Platform width appropriate	11	26	42%
Fall protection provided	3	23	13%
Slide guards installed	4	22	18%
Guardrails present >6 feet	9	25	36%
Training supplied -power tools	3	20	15%
Protective devices on tools	4	23	18%
Nail gun training provided	2	16	13%
Wet methods for tile/concrete	2	16	13%
Potential for heat illness	5	11	45%
Site at risk for lead paint	9	12	75%
Power lines identified	3	10	30%
Equipment >10ft power lines	4	14	28%

### Ongoing Evaluation and Results

Key preliminary experience shows that implementation extends our previous train-the trainer methods and curriculum for peer trainers: the safety liaisons understand that their responsibilities extend beyond teaching to collecting data and providing real world advice, leadership, and advocacy.

Day laborers can complete five-day health and safety trainings and become effective peer trainers, maintain ties to the project, complete safety audits, and act as leaders in participatory consejo meetings. Attrition from the project has been limited; most of the original safety liaisons continue to be involved while future liaisons are recruited.

Increasingly we find that these liaisons recognize unsafe working conditions, accept some safety and health responsibilities, and partner with New Labor and the project team to make decisions about taking action. They continue to grow as leaders and teachers.

A weak construction sector means less opportunities for safety liaisons to maintain employment and negotiate health and safety conditions—however other leadership opportunities, including participatory consejo meetings, have provided an important foundation for this role. This model provides an effective strategy for other community based organizations and university based partners.

# The Project Through Other Pictures











Steps to Make Change: Case Studies

The following case studies from the Safety Liaison project demonstrate the process taken from "Point A" (acquisition of knowledge) to "Point A" (acquisition of knowledge) to "Point B", a results driven action (ex. an OSHA site visit and consequential fines for unsafe working conditions). In other words, Research to Practice (R2P)

# Educate

#### 1. Confronting Unsafe Scaffolds, Electrical Wiring and battling unpaid wages

Case a. Safety liaisons receive training on OSHA workplace health and safety standards, how to recognize violations while filling out a safety audit, and what to do with the information they have collected. They also receive a primer on wage and hour laws.

Case b. Unpaid wage case. At a consejo meeting, participants are informed of a Newark contractor that owes thousands of dollars in unpaid wages. Participants are asked to discuss possible solutions.

Case c. A safety liaison is working for a contractor and recognizes that electrical wiring is unsafe.









3. Safety liaisons come upon an unsafe scaffold in Newark with workers in imminent danger. They make notes of potential violations on their safety audits in the scaffolds and fall protection sections. As a group, the liaisons, discuss how to approach the situation. Consensus is reached that they will first talk to the contractor. The contractor, however just blew them off. So, step two was to be to contact OSHA. First the liaisons take down all the important contact information of the worksite and contractors as well as the specific hazards. Then, they use their direct contact with OSHA to make a complaint

Organize

b. After discussion, the consejo agrees that it is best to go to the contractor's house as a group when he is most likely to be there. Phone calls were not receiving results. 8 participants volunteer to go along with the worker who is owed wages.









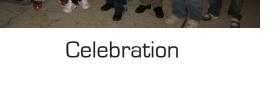
a. OSHA investigators arrive within an hour. The worksite is immediately shut down until the violations are rectified. Two contractors are fined an initial amount of over \$23,000 for their serious violations. Liaisons are kept abreast of findings.

Realize

b. 11 people go to the contractor's house to demand payment as issues like health and safety and unpaid wages are community issues that affect us all. A payment plan is agreed to, and over the course of two months, the unpaid wages are recovered.

c. The contractor changes the outlets on the electrical generator and other wiring at the worksite. He also now provides additional PPE for daily use.







If we don't do it. who will'





