

safety

MassCOSH



net

Spring 2011

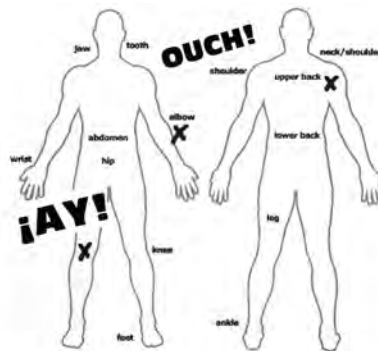


MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

SEIU, MassCOSH shine spotlight on home health care safety

From morning 'til evening, Justine is at 80 year old Goldie's side, lifting her out of bed, holding her up as she walks, and gently holding her as she sits down – every minute aware that she must bear Goldie's weight to prevent the elderly woman from a fall. It's these physically demanding tasks that take a toll on the bodies of personal care attendants (PCAs), putting them at risk of back, shoulder and arm injuries.

In December, 1199 SEIU, which represents 25,000 PCAs, held a forum bringing together the caretakers with safety experts like MassCOSH to learn how to prevent



Body mapping is a helpful tool in workplace safety trainings

disabling injuries and to shine a spotlight on their essential work.

"For the first time in Massachusetts history, PCAs came together to not only learn new skills

about how to do their jobs better, but also about how to take care of themselves in the process," said Becca Gutman, Homecare Director 1199 of SEIU United Healthcare Workers. "PCAs are often putting other people's needs ahead of their own. The union is committed to creating opportunities for PCAs to advance not only in their jobs but also in the rest of their lives."

At a workshop held in Spanish and English, MassCOSH staff Tolle Graham and Isabel Lopez guided the PCAs through body mapping, with participants marking parts of

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Temp. workers, faith communities on the road to justice

They were Episcopalian, Unitarian, Protestant, Catholic and Jewish, but that night in March, as they sat around a circle at the Arlington Street Church, the thirty men and women were joined together with a common mission: to end the widespread and unethical abuse of temporary workers in the Commonwealth.

All eyes were on the man sitting in the middle of the room, cane at his side, who spoke passionately about how abuses he experienced as a temporary worker could have been prevented had the Employment Agency Reform Bill (House Bill 1393) been in place.

"I worked ten hours per day peeling fruit. We had no breaks, until after ten hours of work," said Juan Calderas to the attendees, all members of the New Sanctuary Movement interfaith justice group. "A few months ago, I was carrying a

large bucket of fruit and fell. I broke two discs in my back. When the employer refused to pay my doctor's bills, that's when I learned that I wasn't working for the company at all, but instead for a

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Hello friends,

2011 marks a new chapter for MassCOSH. Rick Rabin, MassCOSH's board chair since 2004 has stepped down from his position to take a full time volunteer role with us. His dedicated leadership will be missed but we are grateful for his continued involvement with our organization.

As MassCOSH's new board chair, I look forward to helping lead the organization into this new decade and taking on all the challenges that will come with it. If just these past few months are at all a sign of things to come, MassCOSH and all of our allies who care deeply about safe, secure jobs will certainly be very busy.

In 2011, you will see MassCOSH take on legislative goals with increased effectiveness, taking lessons learned from banning dangerous floor finishing products to pass temp agency reform and to criminalize the trafficking of day laborers. You can also expect us to take on bigger challenges, like fighting the cuts to OSHA by those who consider the entity a hindrance to profits and not the life saving agency it actually is.

Of course, MassCOSH will be standing with workers every step of the way as they fight with state and national officials who want to see organized labor all but banned.

As chair, I recognize none of this can be done without support. I ask you, if you have not done so already, please take a moment to step up in the fight for safe and healthy jobs by becoming a MassCOSH member. The impact your membership makes is substantial and I look forward to working with you on all these critical issues and more.

Thank you,

Kim Wilson

MassCOSH board chair



On February 22, MassCOSH joined over 1,000 Massachusetts labor supporters at the statehouse to show support for union workers under attack in the Midwest

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Teens Unite for Unions

While thousands of workers continue to rally in Wisconsin, Massachusetts union leadership is ensuring that the next generation of labor leaders are ready to keep the movement strong for decades to come. So when the Greater Boston Labor Council held its “Organizing Our Future” Conference in late February, they welcomed the participation of MassCOSH’s teen peer leaders.

“Unions have a big influence and a big impact on workers’ rights and conditions,” said Shacora Kournegay when asked what she learned overall from the meeting. “All these adults were really looking forward to us leading the movement one day.”

The peer leaders made an equal impact on the adults present that day.

“To see TL@W’s young people at the age where they are just entering the workforce so strongly dedicated to the ideas of collective bargaining and the idea that safe jobs are not something you should compromise on, is truly exciting,” said executive secretary treasurer of the

Greater Boston Labor Council Richard Rodgers. “It’s these teens who will one day be the face of the labor movement.”

TL@W youth are trained from the first day they walk into MassCOSH’s office that organized labor is an important strategy to reducing worksite injuries and ensuring safe jobs.

Nancy Luc, youth coordinator, notes that she is always sure to make time for union education and why it’s important to support Labor’s struggle when working with youth.

“Our teens learn about the labor movement at their schools, but the modern struggle of unions is something many of our teens know nothing about,” explains Luc. “One of the big things we do at TL@W is to get young people involved in rallies and actions that are held by our union members – let them see first hand that the fight is not over.”

TL@W involvement in labor issues has always been a cornerstone of the program. MassCOSH teens each year focus on lobbying at the state house for workers rights, recently preventing a roll back of Child Labor Law protections. TL@W teens



Peer leaders enjoy the spotlight at the Futures meeting

also routinely volunteer at SEIU Local 1199, engaging in critical union mobilization work.

Educating young people about the importance of unions will also be a key component of MassCOSH’s upcoming LEAPS Young Workers Academy being held April 20th – 22nd. The peer leaders are collaborating with key leaders at 1199 in order to include an in-depth look at the history and importance of unions for participants as part of the three day conference.

This year the 4th Annual LEAPS Conference will be held in Dorchester, hosted by Local Union 1199 SEIU. 1199 is located at 150 Mount Vernon St. Dorchester, MA 02125 and all participants will stay in the Comfort Inn located at 900 William T. Morrissey Blvd.

School indoor air effort scores EPA award



Members of the Boston Urban Asthma Coalition accept the EPA award.

In December, at a special ceremony in Washington DC, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) presented the Boston Urban Asthma Coalition and MassCOSH with the Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Award, recognizing the groups’ “commitment to improving asthma rates by promoting good indoor air quality and best practices.”

Academic studies have shown that poor air quality makes it harder for students to learn in the classroom. Research has also revealed that students who work in classrooms with good air quality score about 15% higher on

standardized tests than those with bad air quality.

“Every student and teacher deserves an environment that allows them to fulfill their potential and achieve their goals,” said Mike Flynn, EPA’s Director of Office of Radiation and Indoor Air. “Effective IAQ management programs help make this happen.”

Since 2005, the coalition has advised Environmental Committees in 22 schools through a city-wide ‘wellness’ initiative, resulting in increased awareness about school building conditions that affect asthma, overall health, and learning. Additionally, the coalition has implemented six annual environmental audits of Boston’s 138 school buildings.

“Schools are sometimes not thought of as workplaces, but they are, and air quality is just as important for a factory worker in a manufacturing plant as it is for a student in an elementary school,” says Tolle Graham, MassCOSH labor and environment coordinator. “I hope that other school districts around the country

see what this coalition approach can achieve and try it for themselves.”

Despite significant maintenance and capital budget cuts for Boston schools in the past few years, 2010 annual audit data of asthma trigger levels, as compared to 2004-2009 data, indicate decreases in several key areas, such as pest problems, clutter and leaks.

“It means a great deal to us to have the EPA recognize the link between quality education and healthy environmental conditions,” said MassCOSH executive director Marcy Goldstein-Gelb. “We hope that we can parlay this recognition into an increased commitment at the local, state and federal level for resources to invest in school infrastructure.”

Interested in applying for IAQ Tools for Schools award for the great work being done at your school? Visit <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/awards> for award applications, instructions and summaries of past award winners.

SEIU, MassCOSH shine spotlight on home health care safety continued from page 1

the body that they noted feeling pain in after working. Most noted X's on almost every part of the body. By each mark was a list of common injuries that can occur from tasks PCAs complete hundreds of times a week. The body map launched an open the discussion among the PCAs about what causes strains, sprains, and injuries and what are some reasonable ergonomic solutions they can incorporate into how they perform their job.

Lack of lift equipment, heights of tables, overexertion, awkward postures, and lack of accessibility were some of the risk factors identified as causing PCA aches and pains. The discussion also included a list of realistic solutions that the union could work on with

consumers as part of a statewide discussion on PCA safety, such as accessing resources for lifting equipment. Other solutions discussed required opening up a dialogue with the consumer about the PCA's limitations, helping to avoid some job hazards while respecting the consumer's need for care.

MassCOSH has already planned to participate in the next PCA conference which will be held in Springfield in fall 2011 to continue training these workers who help so many people who can no longer help themselves.

"Some people think that working in homes is the last type of job you can be hurt in, but when you are helping people, you are doing a lot

of tasks, like lifting, that over time, can lead to chronic pain," explained Lopez. "This meeting was the first step in letting workers and the public know that these care takers are important and need to be taken care of as well."

Interested in learning more about ergonomics and how to avoid injury at your place of work? Contact Labor and Environment Coordinator Tolle Graham at tolle.graham@masscosh.org

Temp. workers, faith communities on the road to justice continued from page 1

temporary agency."

Calderas, who first came to MassCOSH last year seeking medical assistance for his injury, has helped launch the first series of REAL Talk Tours – bringing temporary workers and community members to congregations and community centers across the state to highlight abuses in the temporary industry. REAL (Reform Employment Agency Law) is the acronym for the campaign to curb industry abuses that's being waged by Calderas, dozens of other temporary workers, MassCOSH, and over 40 labor, community and legal organizations.

The Employment Agency Reform bill, House 1393, filed by Rep. Dorcena Forry and Senator Jack Hart, addresses a gaping hole in Massachusetts law that excludes temporary agencies from state regulation. Other employment agencies that charge a fee to their clients, such as agencies that place models and accountants, must

undergo a licensing process which helps authorities track and address workplace abuses. This bill streamlines agency law, eliminating the sometimes burdensome licensing requirement and gives the state oversight over all temporary agencies. It also requires temporary agencies to provide blue collar employees with basic written information about their job, such as the name of the employer, the wages, and the workers compensation provider – critical information that would have helped Calderas after his fall.

The bill's benefit to both workers and employers has also garnered the endorsement of the Massachusetts Bar Association.

"The Massachusetts Bar Association's overwhelming support for the Employment Agency Reform Bill makes complete sense for many reasons," said Doug Sheff, Vice President of the Massachusetts Bar Association. "First, it protects the most vulnerable workers in the Commonwealth from abuse, even serious injury and death. But it also

protects law-abiding businesses from being undercut by fly-by-night temp agencies."

The coalition achieved its first round of success in February, securing eighty-eight legislator co-sponsors. Now the coalition is building up toward the legislative hearing on the bill, using the REAL Talk Tour to gain grassroots support and inviting supporters to share their views with their legislators.

"We've seen a groundswell of support for this bill," said Isabel Lopez, MassCOSH's Worker Center Coordinator who's helping to spearhead the REAL Coalition. "I think it's because this bill is not only common sense, but will help thousands of people who work in the shadows of the economy and are so vulnerable to abuses."

Looking to learn more about The Employment Agency Reform bill? Contact Marcy Goldstein-Gelb at mary.gelb@masscosh.org for more information and how you can get involved.

"Secure Communities" promotes insecurity

For years, MassCOSH's Worker Center has helped immigrant workers navigate state enforcement agencies in an effort to fight unsafe working conditions and wage violations. But Governor Patrick's announcement in November that he would sign on to the controversial Secure Communities Program has caused great concern in the immigrant community, threatening to roll back the Worker Center's progress in the fight for safe jobs.

The Secure Communities Program requires police to run the prints of everyone taken into custody, regardless of guilt, against FBI files and Department of Homeland Security immigration records. If it is determined that the individual is undocumented, the deportation process is started.

Worker Center staff fear the program will create racial profiling practices and cause immigrant workers to become distrustful of state programs meant to help workers.

"If the police give information to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), we would not look for help [with our job], we would keep our mouths shut in front of people who could help us," said one worker reflecting on the impacts the program would have on himself and others. "The employers would win."

Advocates also say the program is being used to deport workers, even if the individual has not committed a criminal act. According to Centro Presente, of the more than 600 workers deported under this program, 286 did not have criminal records.

"We are getting calls every week about this," reports Worker Center organizer Jonny Arevalo. "[Workers] are really feeling stressed; they are afraid to report any instances of abuse or accidents because they believe federal authorities would become involved and deport them."

The Worker Center has reported

that some workers are no longer reporting dangerous working conditions, extreme hours, and a few are no longer going to the hospital when injured on the job, afraid police stationed there will report them to ICE after treatment. Worse still, some employers are actively exploiting the program, using fear tactics to keep immigrants from reporting poor working conditions.

To help ease worker's concerns, MassCOSH is incorporating critical information into its trainings, letting workers know their rights even with the Secure Communities Program in place.

"The Attorneys General's Office has a department called the "Fair Wage Division," said Worker Center organizer Mirna Montano. "The department has been meeting with the state's workers centers to explain to them they are independent of any organization which could involve them with ICE – that they are still a resource immigrants can turn to if they have had any issues with wages being stolen or being underpaid."

The Workers Center is also letting workers know that the police at hospitals cannot legally ask individuals for documentation when receiving care. The center has been stressing that if you are hurt on the job, you should immediately seek care from a health provider.

"Worker health and safety has been dealt a severe blow with this program," said Montano. "But those who depend on the Workers Center for resources on improving their working conditions can rest assured that we will continue to do all we can to help the community and fight for their rights."

State officials are holding meetings throughout the year to discuss the program in detail. To find out how you can attend one of these meetings, contact Jonny Arevalo by calling 617-825-7233 x12.



Women unite to confront sexual harassment

Since 2009, twenty Latina and Brazilian women have regularly come together, shared experiences, learned about their rights, and developed resources and strategies to confront an occupational hazard that is causing widespread harm in their community: sexual harassment and assault.

Now the women, members of MassCOSH and other local groups, are reaching out to other women throughout Greater Boston and offering them the support they need to stop sexual harassment in their workplace.

"Harassment on the job can lead to needless stress for woman and can negatively affect them even when they are not at work," said Worker Center organizer Mirna Montano. "The community has decided that this is a problem that needs addressing and MassCOSH is more than happy to help lead this initiative"

To date, the women have developed a culturally tailored sexual harassment curriculum and an informational brochure to get other women involved with the group and encourage them to speak more about the issue and how it affects them in their workplaces and in their communities.

"Sexual harassment is a complicated problem that will take time to eliminate, but these dedicated women are taking the issue head on – they should be very proud," said Montano.

MassCOSH is looking for a few good women to help continue this important work; email

Mirna.montano@masscosh.org to learn more.

OSHA at risk, worker safety in jeopardy



In January, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) turned 40 years old. In just four short decades OSHA has been credited with reducing workplace fatalities by 65 percent and has issued millions of dollars in fines to irresponsible employers who have placed workers in needless danger.

Now OSHA is facing its biggest political battle yet to remain an effective, lifesaving organization for the American worker.

US House Republicans have voted to cut OSHA's budget by nearly 20% for the remainder of the Fiscal Year, claiming it enacts expensive rules without regard to their effect on business.

If approved, this new budget would translate into a cut of nearly 350 inspections workplaces in Massachusetts alone and strip OSHA of essential tools for protecting workers. Also proposed to be eliminated is the organization's web

site, making valuable online statistics regarding inspections, fatalities and fines inaccessible for workers and employers.

"The Republicans have proposed a 20 percent cut and given [that] half a year's over, that really means a 40 percent cut," OSHA administrator David Michaels says. "It would really have a devastating effect on all of our activities." We know that OSHA doesn't kill jobs. It stops jobs from killing workers. When employers embrace safety, they actually save money. We know that's true. They often don't believe it, but we show them."

Melissa King, a MassCOSH Board Member whose father was killed in a workplace accident is highly concerned over talks of cutting OSHA.

"Can Congress look in the eye of family members whose loved ones were killed on the job and tell us that OSHA can be cut without more accidents and more deaths?," asked

King. "We have seen first hand that too many employers will only institute safety measures if they know OSHA will enforce safety laws and offer stiff penalties to employers who violate the law."

Concerned about what OSHA cuts would mean for you and your loved ones? MassCOSH and other safety advocates from across the country are asking its members and the public to call their Senators and urge them to restore OSHA's budget.

Senator Scott Brown

(202) 224-4543

317 Russell Senate Office Building,
Washington DC 20510

Senator John Kerry

(202) 224-2742

218 Russell Senate Office Building,
Washington DC 20510

Volunteer Spotlight Rick Rabin



Workers who renovate paint or tear down old houses or commercial buildings encounter a wide variety of health and safety hazards, often exposing themselves and their families to lead from removing old paint. When a worker comes to MassCOSH fearing lead poisoning, MassCOSH turns to Rick Rabin, former board chair and now

full-time volunteer.

Rabin's credentials are impressive, having worked at the Massachusetts Division of Occupational Safety for almost 25 years. For most of his career, he directed the Occupational Lead Poisoning Registry, a program that provided information and assistance to workers exposed to lead, along with their employers and physicians.

Rabin's volunteer work started in 1980, while studying public health at the University of Massachusetts, working at the Springfield MassCOSH office. His worker safety volunteer work with MassCOSH spanned from 2004 to 2010, serving as the organizations chairperson on the board of directors.

"I wanted to play an active part in an organization that was both

informing workers of their workplace rights and helping them to organize to exercise those rights, said Rabin. "MassCOSH has been such an organization for over 30 years."

Rick left state service in January and now volunteers full-time at the MassCOSH office. He is using his time at MassCOSH to organize two training programs for residential construction workers: one is a 10-hour class on construction hazards (OSHA-10 course), and the other will focus specifically on lead paint (Renovation, Repair and Painting – the Environmental Protection Agency's RRP rule). He will also be coordinating the services of health and safety experts to help unions evaluate the hazards in their members' workplaces.

Get to know a sponsor

Anyone who has worked to improve worker health and safety in New England knows that Chuck Levenstein is a pioneer in the field. He helped to found Urban Planning Aid, which led to MassCOSH, and worked with the New Directions Program that launched ConnectiCOSH. He was also head of the Work Environment Program at UMass Lowell.

Levenstein has lead a remarkable career dedicated to improving the lives of others. So when MassCOSH launched its new Leadership Donor Campaign, he felt giving was a great way to reaffirm his commitment to the cause.

"I was provided a scholarship to go to school by my father's union (Local 3, IBEW) and, in fact, lived well as the child of an immigrant union member," Levenstein said, explaining his dedication to improving working conditions for all workers. "In my mind, I had, and have, a duty to pay back for the benefits I enjoyed."

Chuck is doing his part by helping MassCOSH achieve its goal of raising \$15,000 from dedicated individuals who contribute from \$500 to \$2,500.

"MassCOSH does two things that I admire," said Levenstein, explaining why he is a MassCOSH Leadership Donor. "First, [MassCOSH's] success in bringing in young people into the health and safety movement is remarkable. It's essential that young people understand that they have information and that they have rights. Secondly, [MassCOSH's] work with immigrants is path breaking. The people who are subjected to the worst working conditions require attention...in terms of information about hazards and about the right to organize and fight oppressive employers."

Levenstein encourages others with the means to become a Leadership Donor to do so.

"Working with MassCOSH – with the union health and safety committees, with the youth projects, with the immigrant workers centers – these are ways to strengthen and fight for democracy and to resist the barbaric pursuit of profit," said Levenstein.



MassCOSH's work is made possible with support from our members and from:

- Barr Foundation
- The Boston Bar Foundation
- Boston Foundation
- Boston Women's Fund
- Clean Water Action
- Clipper Ship Foundation
- The Clowes Fund
- Health Resources in Action (through the Mass. Department of Public Health)
- Herman and Frieda L. Miller Foundation
- The Hyams Foundation
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health
- Massachusetts Attorney General
- Massachusetts Department of Industrial Accidents
- Mass Energy (through MassSAVE)
- Massachusetts Environmental Trust
- Ms. Foundation for Women
- The New England Consortium
- Tufts University
- New Directions Foundation
- New World Foundation
- National COSH (Public Welfare Fund)
- National COSH (through the US Department of Labor)
- University of Massachusetts Lowell
- US Environmental Protection Agency

Concerned About Worker Safety? Join MassCOSH!

Unions

Less than 100 members	\$115
101 – 500 members	\$250
500 – 2000 members	\$520
Over 2000 members	\$785

Non-profit Organizations No dues

Individuals

Ally	\$ 30
Advocate	\$ 75
Champion	\$150
Movement Builder	\$250
Low income	\$ 10
Extra contributions welcome	\$ _____

Total Enclosed \$ _____

Interested in volunteering?

- I want to join a MassCOSH committee:
- Legal Health Tech Labor
 - Immigrant Safe Work Teen
 - Research
- I want to get involved in campaigns
- I want to volunteer

MassCOSH members receive:

- Information and resources
- Free training workshops
- Updates on campaigns
- Newsletters
- Vote for board of directors

Name _____

Title _____

Union and local # / Organization _____

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State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

E-mail _____

Number of members (if union) _____

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All contributions are tax deductible.



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MOURN for the dead **FIGHT** for the living

**SAVE THE DATE
AND JOIN US!**

**Workers Memorial Commemoration
Thursday, April 28th, 2011
12:00pm–1:15pm**

Stairs in front of the State House

Rain Location: Grand Staircase, 1st floor, State House

MassCOSH will also host a special commemorative breakfast in Room 437 of the State House at 10:30am specifically for families that have lost a loved one due to a workplace incident.

HONOR

our brothers and sisters who were killed, injured or suffered from work-related illness on the job last year

DEMAND

strong workplace health and safety protections

TAKE ACTION

to pass safety and health legislation to protect all workers in Massachusetts

At the event our special Workers Memorial Day report, *Dying for Work in Massachusetts*, will be released, highlighting the fact that workers continue to be killed and maimed on the job in record numbers.

For more information or to RSVP for the families' breakfast, please contact Jeff Newton at 617-825-7233 x14 or jeff.newton@masscosh.org.