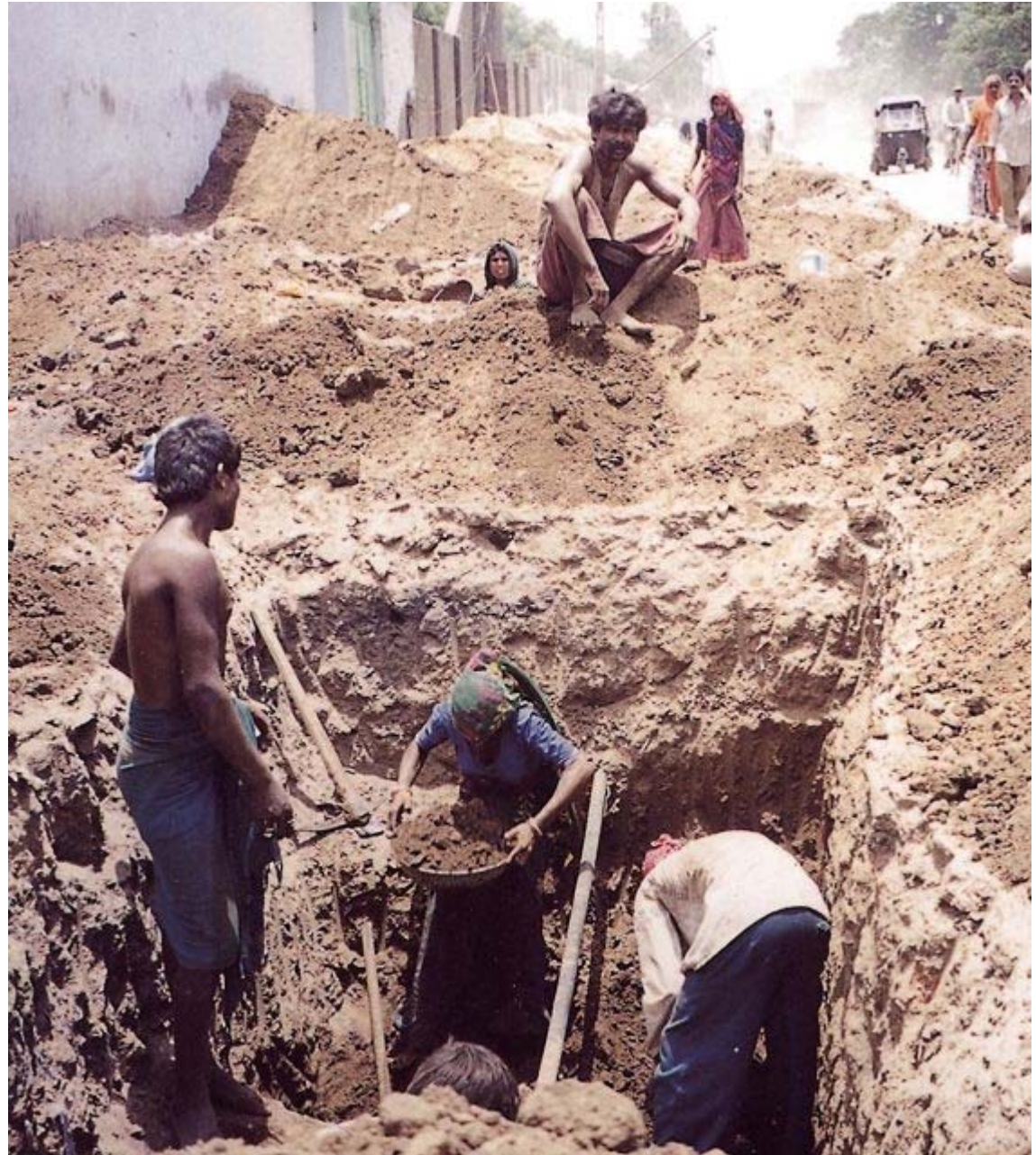


# Construction OS&H

**Workers'  
perspectives**

**Trade Union  
approach**



The three sections of the workers' perspectives

<b>The Trade Union Approach to Health and Safety</b>
Organising for a Healthy and Safe Workplace
Getting Management to Make Improvements

# Aims

1. Identify the main health and safety problems in our workplaces
2. Develop a Trade Union approach to occupational safety and health
3. Investigate hazards at work
4. Build workers' involvement, awareness, and support on occupational safety and health
5. Develop trade union organisation to ensure that employers eliminate or control risks
6. Develop confidence, knowledge and skills

Which will:

- Lead to practical action in the workplace
- Improve health and safety conditions for workers

Experience has shown us that Trade Union education should be based upon the principles of co-operation and sharing. These are the basic principles of trade union democracy.

To encourage this process, the training activities :

Are designed to be worked on by small groups of participants

Have aims describing what should result from the work

Have a task defining what the small group should do

Allow groups to report back, compare ideas, and reach conclusions

# Discussion on pre-course activity: OS&H survey

## **Reminder**

### AIMS

To help us to:

Talk to workers and our Trade Union members

Obtain their views and other information

Make sure that the course is relevant to our situation

### TASK

Before you come on the course, have a short discussion with a cross section of people at work. Make a note of their answers to the following questions, and bring your notes along to the course.

# Questions & information

1. What are the main health, safety and welfare concerns that they have at work?
2. What is their employer doing to protect their health, safety and welfare?
3. Can the Union do more on health, safety and welfare matters?

Try to obtain information that you think will be helpful on the course.

For example:

- Union policies on Occupational Safety and Health
- Collective Bargaining Agreements relating to Occupational Health and Safety
- Safety Committee Minutes
- Company health and safety policy and site safety rules
- Other information on health and safety you think may be useful

# What workers & trade union members think

## AIMS

To help us to:

Discuss views on health and safety in our workplaces

Develop a Trade Union approach

## TASK

In your small group, discuss what workers and union members said during the pre-course survey. Prepare a report on:

The main health, safety and welfare problems identified

What they think the employer is doing, and what the Union could do on health and safety

Elect a spokesperson to report back

# The trade union approach to health and safety: workers know best

Institutional Participation – increase Trade Union contribution in tripartite and bipartite structures on health and safety at international, national, and local levels.

Participation in the Workplace and Collective Bargaining - establishment of Trade Union health and safety representatives and health and safety committees, negotiation of company health and safety policies.

Global Health and Safety Campaigns – including a worldwide ban on all new use of asbestos, and for better controls over work with existing asbestos.

Education and Training for Trade Union representatives to help them organise effectively on health and safety



Injuries and ill health are caused because employers fail to provide a safe and healthy working environment. The employer should provide:

A working environment where hazards are identified, removed or properly controlled before problems occur

Safe systems of work

Full information for workers

Good health and safety training programmes

Opportunities for workers through their Unions, to negotiate health and safety clauses in collective agreements, and participate actively in health and safety at work

# Unions & OS&H

The best way to improve health and safety standards in the workplace is through a Trade Union organisation. Unions can raise awareness, put pressure on employers, and campaign for negotiated improvements.

There are laws that say what employers should do to prevent injuries and ill-health, but there are not enough inspectors, and they do not have the resources to effectively police every workplace.

No matter how strict the law is, or how many inspectors there are, workers and Unions have the direct interest. It is our lives, limbs and health that are at stake.

## Unions & OS&H (2)

It is the job of Trade Unions and members at work to try to make sure that the employer keeps to his/her responsibilities.

Some of the ways to achieve this are as follows:

Building a strong Union membership

Electing Union Health and Safety Reps.

Organising on Health and Safety

# The Trade Union approach (1)

It is the employer's responsibility to make the workplace healthy and safe

The role of the Trade Union is to insist that the employer acts responsibly

Employers must:

Eliminate or reduce hazards to workers, rather than expecting workers to adapt to the hazards around them

Ensure that health and welfare are dealt with as well as the more obvious risks to safety

Consider the environmental impact of work activity, and the hazards created for local communities

# The Trade Union approach (2)

Unions must:

Involve, inform, and educate workers and union members to support the union's drive for healthy and safe working conditions

Work as a united body at all levels in the union. Health and safety is no different from any other trade union issue

Pressurise the employer to eliminate or control risks. Legal standards are helpful but we cannot rely on them.

# Workplace TU reps & ILO agreements (1)

- Selection of representatives in health and safety by employees
- Protection of representatives from victimisation or discrimination
- Paid time off to be allowed to carry out the functions of safety representative
- Paid time off to be trained in order to function as a safety representative
- The right to receive adequate information from the employer
- The right to inspect the workplace
- The right to investigate complaints from workers on health and safety matters

## Workplace TU reps & ILO agreements (2)

- The right to make representations to the employer on these matters and to negotiate
- The right to be consulted over health and safety arrangements
- The right to be consulted about the use of technical advisers by the employer and to call in technical advisers
- The right to accompany health and safety authority inspectors when they inspect the workplace and to make complaints to them when necessary.
- Participation, and equal representation, in the Joint Health and Safety Committee

# Functions of Union reps

- Talking to workers and union members, and taking up their complaints with management
- Involving, informing, and consulting workers and union members on their priorities, and agreeing strategies for tackling risks
- Systematically inspecting the workplace on a regular basis
- Investigating accidents, ill-health and near misses
- Consulting with management
- Monitoring the employer's performance on health and safety
- Making representations, and negotiating with the employer to ensure the safety and health of workers
- Talking to Government health and safety inspectors
- Participating in joint management - union safety committees in the workplace



# DIY research in the workplace

## Passive research

- Publications
- Independent experts in governmental, non-governmental organisations & TUs
- Statistics: national, industry or workplace

## Active research

- Risk mapping of the workplace
- Carrying out inspections
- Surveys and interviews on symptoms and hazards
- Body mapping
- Meetings
- Information exchange and training

# Workplace inspections

Communication with workers is the key to finding out the information we need and to negotiating improvements.

It is important that we involve workers at all stages of the inspection and make sure we have their support for:

Finding out their problems and complaints before we inspect

Talking to them during the inspection

Reporting back to them after the inspection

# Workplace inspections - physical hazards

- Falls from heights, scaffolds, roofs, ladders, trips and slips
- Excavation hazards and confined spaces
- Machinery, entrapment, cuts
- Transport (forklifts, hoists, cranes)
- Electricity (temporary installations, tools and plant, systems for identifying underground cables)
- Noise and vibration
- Manual handling and lifting, repetitive work, forced postures

# Workplace inspections - chemical hazards

- Solvents (paints, laquers, varnishes, strippers, glues)
- Pesticides (e.g. timber treatments)
- Dust (wood, cement, MMF, silica, gypsum)
- Cement burns
- Asbestos dust

# Workplace inspections - biological hazards

- Contaminated water supply
- Malaria
- Dengue fever
- Weil's disease (rats)
- Infectious diseases, such as hepatitis or tuberculosis

# Workplace inspections – psycho-social hazards

- Poor work organisation, instruction and supervision
- Work overload: long hours, shift work, fast pace, lack of breaks, productivity pressure, being pushed to take shortcuts, low pay
- Insecure contractual conditions
- Lack of information and training needed to carry out work and to prevent hazards
- Lack of welfare facilities (toilets, washing and changing facilities, facilities for eating and taking breaks)
- Stress, due to being exposed to risks
- Bullying
- Lack of participation and consultation

# Risk mapping

## AIMS

Identify priority risks

Develop plans to deal with the risks

## TASK

In small groups, draw a typical work activity/workplace with which you are all familiar (or you may prefer to work from the handout given to you)

Put in as much detail as possible: people, tools, materials etc

When the map is complete, mark the Risk Factors on the drawings

We will then look at the drawings and discuss the risks you have identified

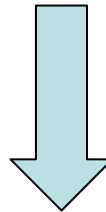
# Taking up OS&H problems

Use the approach of

**Problem**



**Information**



**Plan**



# Health surveys

If one person has a bad back or constant headaches then it's probably an individual health problem

If everyone or several people doing the same job have similar health problems it's almost certainly occupational

Follow your instincts and follow up with some detective work

# Health survey

## AIMS:

- Help us to find information on health at work
- Design a Survey

## TASK: In small groups:

- Choose a health hazard – perhaps paint, varnish, or dust
- Where do you find existing information?
- What are the main health problems workers might have?
- Write a short list of questions you will ask workers about their experience of working with these substances
- How will you collect the information?
- How can you use this information to improve working conditions?

# Body mapping

## AIM:

Help us to find information at work

## TASK:

- We have some coloured stickers
- We need volunteers who have aches and pains they think are caused by their job - especially from lifting, or from repetitive tasks
- Volunteers will mime this task for some minutes at their normal pace of work
- The rest of us can ask them questions about the job, and we place the stickers on their bodies where we think they have pains
- The volunteers tell us if we're right
- What are the main things, or risk factors, that are causing these pains?

# Inspections & information gathering

## AIM:

- Identify priority risks
- Develop plans to deal with the risks

## TASK:

- In your small group choose a priority health and safety risk from one of your workplaces
- Then use the Action Plan which follows to decide what needs to be done
- Elect a spokesperson to report back

# Tackling risks Action Plan: the problem

- What are the facts?
- Which workers and union members are affected?
- What are the apparent causes?
- What are the real causes?
- Is it a short-term or a long-term problem?

# Tackling risks Action Plan: investigation

What information do we need?

What do workers and union members want?

What does our union say?

What do our agreements say?

Will national law or international standards help?

# Tackling risks action plan: plan for action

How can we involve workers and Union members?

What are our short- and long-term aims?

How should we take up the issue with management?

What pressure and arguments can we use to win improvements?