

# TRAIN WORKERS FOR ACTION

*“At a union workshop, our members learned that lead dust is harmful and can get on your clothes. You should wash up and change your clothes before leaving work so you don’t take the dust home. Taking it home can endanger your family’s health. One worker said, ‘We don’t change our clothes—we just hop in the car and take off. Anyway, we don’t have a place to change and we don’t have a place to wash up.’ With the union’s help, some of the guys went back and got the company to put in a small change area and a wash-up station. Everyone started changing out of their work clothes and washing up before going home.*

*The company also started its own lead training program for the workers, which we found out is required by law.”*

*—Laborers union organizer*

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← At left: The Toxic Avengers, a California street theater group, educate workers and the public about the dangers at work.

**T**here are all kinds of worker health and safety training programs around. Some promote “personal responsibility” as the solution to safety problems. This theory says workers should just learn to be more careful. These “behavior-based” training programs are popular with many employers because they send the message that the problem is the worker, not conditions that management needs to fix. Other training programs are very technical and emphasize detailed knowledge about specific hazards.

What’s different about *training for action* is that it mobilizes workers to do something to improve conditions. This is training developed and presented by unions, workers, or worker advocates. It is a springboard for change. Such training does provide useful information, but it also encourages people to act on that information. They learn how to set goals, decide strategy, and work together collectively to make things better.

## What Is This Tool?

An action-oriented training program brings workers together to learn new information, gain skills, share experiences, ask questions, and make plans to apply their learning to improve workplace conditions.

Training can take many forms, including:

- a one-time workshop
- a short, informal “tailgate” meeting during the work day at the job site
- a hands-on practice session
- a series of classes
- a guest speaker or panel discussion
- a film or video, with discussion afterward
- a speak-out or public hearing.

A training event or program can be used to build your committee’s skills, to launch or promote a specific health and safety campaign, and to reach out to involve new groups of workers from different work areas.

**Activist training.** You may want to offer training to your health and safety committee, organizing committee, leadership group, stewards, or other activists who will be dealing with health and safety. A training program for your activists is a good way to get people “up to speed,” especially if some haven’t had much experience with health and safety. The more people you have who are knowledgeable, the more effective you can be.

Sometimes it's most efficient to tie health and safety training into existing union educational programs. See if health and safety topics can be added to shop steward training, organizing committee training, or a leadership development program.

If schedules and resources permit, another option for your activists may be health and safety classes in the labor studies program at a nearby college or university.

In some cases, your union contract may permit training on paid company time. If you don't yet have a union, see if you can convince the employer to provide paid release time. You can argue that health and safety training should be treated the same as training in any other job-related skill.

Your potential audience for this type of training may be all your activists, or a more limited group who are working on a specific issue. You may also want to invite workers who are *thinking* about joining the committee or becoming active on these issues in some other way.

**Worker training.** You may want to present short workshops on topics of special interest, open to everyone at the workplace. These can be an important part of your outreach to co-workers. Workshops can make your committee work more visible, help recruit new activists, and get a broad group of workers thinking about problems that need to be corrected. They also help build solidarity among groups of workers who may otherwise be divided or isolated because they work in different departments or on different shifts.

Publicize the event as widely as you can. You may even want to invite family and community members.

## STORIES FROM THE FRONT LINES

### Training Program Helps Carpenters Tackle Safety



Workers at a California modular home assembly plant recently voted to join the United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC). Located in California's central valley, the plant is one of the largest employers in the region, which is primarily agricultural. 150 workers are employed at the plant, including many native Spanish speakers.

After winning a representation election, the union tried to identify key issues for a first contract. Wages were a clear priority for the workers, but improving health and safety was also high on the list. Modular homes are built on an assembly line. The process involves lifting and assembling enormous walls, using power saws, applying toxic chemicals to preserve and paint wood, and many repetitive motions. Workers reported lost fingers, neck injuries, skin rashes, and breathing problems from dust and chemicals. Noise and unsafe machinery were also big issues.

To prepare for bargaining, workers formed a 20-member committee to deal with health and safety as well as other potential contract issues. One of the committee's first projects was a worker training program, conducted in English and Spanish. The program covered health and safety laws, how OSHA works, and how hazards can be corrected. This training helped build workers' knowledge about their rights and their interest in future union health and safety activities.

The committee and other workers who attended the training also decided to request employer injury and illness records and to develop specific contract language around health and safety.

The training and the campaign were very successful in involving workers. The workers continued to support the union even when negotiations stalled. One worker at a training workshop said, "I've worked here 30 years. I haven't gotten a raise in the last ten. My knees and back hurt. I'm just trying to hold on until I can retire. I've got to fight for the union and a contract that makes this a safer place to work for my children and other family members."

A union official noted that "Our members got really involved in this campaign. Health and safety is a real issue where we can make improvements even while struggling to get the company to the bargaining table."

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## **Why Use This Tool?**

### **Advantages**

- Training can build a stronger committee.
- Training sessions provide a great opportunity to understand what moves people.
- Training can help identify good campaign issues (or which issues are "hot").
- Training can attract workers to participate. Most workers are eager to learn relevant information that will help them, both in daily life and at work. They often respond enthusiastically to training opportunities because they are looking for ways to gain better control over their jobs.
- Training boosts confidence and morale.
- Participants develop organizational and leadership skills.

- If the training is designed as a “train the trainer” activity, stewards, activists, and other worker-leaders can learn to do similar training for co-workers in the future.
- Training prepares workers to interact with management. It can help put them on an equal footing when approaching management about a health and safety issue.
- If training encourages action, it can lead to real health and safety improvements in the workplace. It could save someone’s health or life.
- Successful training events give visibility and legitimacy to the sponsoring organization. Whether the training is presented by your health and safety committee, a union, or a community organization, it builds respect for the sponsor.

## Challenges

- If training is not well-planned or the content is not relevant, workers can be disappointed. This can affect how they view your committee, the union, or other sponsors of the training.
- Training requires resources, including time and funds.
- You can fall into the trap of only *training* rather than actually *doing*. Stay focused on your action plan.

## STORIES FROM THE FRONT LINES

### Safety Training Inspires Coalition Against Bus Violence



A Northern California bus driver attended a 16-week health and safety course in the labor studies program at his local community college. As a long-time driver on the swing shift and a union steward, he came to class with chilling stories about the violence that drivers encounter on a daily basis—murders, robberies, assaults, and shootings.

“My worst moment was the night a shot whizzed by my head while I was in the driver’s seat. I hit the floor and was so scared that I wet myself,” he recalled in class.

Motivated by a class assignment that asked students to request injury and illness records (Cal/OSHA Log 300) from their employers, the driver gathered statistics about the problem. He wasn’t surprised to find that the records documented the many stories his co-workers had told him on breaks and at union meetings. But the class also convinced him that documentation wasn’t enough.

With co-workers and union leaders, the driver circulated flyers sharing his information on violent incidents with patrons who rode the bus daily and also were at risk.

“We’re going to build a coalition of workers and passengers,” he said. “We’ll share what we’ve learned and survey people to find out more about their concerns. We know we need to push for better lighting on routes and funding for a more effective security system. We’ll also take a look at how other cities have dealt with these issues. With all this information, we’re going to submit a proposal to the joint labor-management board of the transit system.”

## **Step by Step**

*As you go through these steps, use the **Training Worksheet** at the end of this chapter to record your training plans.*

### **1. Define the purpose of the training.**

You need to have a clear idea of *why* you are organizing a training program. What is your goal? Is it to build a committee’s skills and confidence? To “test” an issue to see how workers respond to it? To mobilize workers for a campaign to improve conditions? Of course, you may have more than one of these goals in mind. Discuss your goals at a meeting.

### **2. Determine training needs and select topics.**

Committee members and other activists may want training on hazards of special interest in your particular workplace, or on “skill building” topics like how to file an OSHA complaint or how to develop relationships with the media. Interview or survey people about their training interests and needs. For a sample form you can use, see the **Health and Safety Training Survey** at the end of this chapter.

Also try to find out what *level* of training will benefit the most committee members and activists. Ask how much they already know and what previous classes or experience they have had. Your group may reflect a range of experience and knowledge, from beginners to experts.

When you are planning a training workshop for a broad audience (not just committee members and activists), it’s often still a good idea to do some type of survey ahead of time. You can distribute a short questionnaire to co-workers. Suggest some topics, or let people suggest their own.

If you've been out talking to workers about general union matters and one health and safety issue keeps getting raised, you may not need to do a survey. As you listen to workers' concerns in the course of an organizing campaign or other mobilization effort, you'll learn about the problems and issues that people feel deeply about. If a particular issue starts to emerge, make a point to ask others about it too.

Another approach is to hold an initial workshop on general health and safety, and use some time during the workshop to see what topics the participants want to cover next.

### 3. Tie the training to an action plan.

“Training for action” implies that people will be encouraged to do something with the information they have learned. The purpose of your training is to create and carry out a plan of action.

Evaluate not only how much interest there is in various topics, but also whether they can lead to a successful safety campaign with clear, winnable goals. Is there a problem with any of the proposed topics? For example, would it be difficult to organize a campaign on that topic because it is so technical it wouldn't be understood by co-workers and community supporters? Will management put up a lot of resistance to demands on that topic because the problem is very expensive to fix?

Discuss in advance how you will involve people who attend the training in follow-up actions. These might include petition campaigns, OSHA complaints, surveys, or any of the other “tools” described in this book.

Prior to the training, try to come up with an initial action plan that participants can be involved in and can commit to. It should include short-term and long-term goals, as well as strategies for achieving them. See the sample **Action Plan Worksheet** at the end of Chapter 2.

When you have developed an initial action plan to present at your training session, go over it with anyone who needs to “buy in” for it to be successful, such as the leadership of your union or other organization.

Don't make your initial action plan too specific. You want to give participants a chance to add to it or revise it. That will boost their commitment because the final plan will be their own. Be open to the idea that action plans may emerge from the training that are different from yours.

### 4. Choose a planning team.

See if a group of committee members and/or other activists will volunteer to act as a planning team. This team will be responsible for logistics. They should also

coordinate with the union or other sponsoring organization as a whole, working closely with leaders, stewards, staff, and other committees. There may be ways to link this health and safety training to other organizational priorities and campaigns. This kind of support can be very important to your success.

## **5. Develop a budget and secure funding.**

Come up with a rough budget. Estimate the cost of meeting space, publicity, training materials, and trainers' fees (if any). In some cases, there may be other expenses such as equipment rental, refreshments, childcare, or an interpreter's fees. If you have not been successful in getting the employer to give participants paid release time to attend, you might want to consider paying low-wage workers a modest stipend, such as a \$25 grocery store coupon.

Once you have an estimated budget, look for sources of funding. Will your union or organization pay the cost or contribute toward it? Submit your budget to the leadership or make a motion at a meeting. Approach worker advocacy groups, "COSH" groups, college or university programs, or professional organizations. (See Appendix 2.) They may contribute trainers and materials, and sometimes have grants that will help pay other training costs.

## **6. Organize logistics.**

Set the date and time, find and reserve a suitable location, and obtain needed equipment and materials. Arrange for food and childcare (if needed), and handle other logistics, such as photocopying.

## **7. Select trainers.**

Next, recruit one or more trainers. They should have knowledge of the particular topic you are presenting, and a reputation as clear and well-organized. Make sure their training style allows for group participation, and that they understand that training should lead to action.

The trainer(s) may be more experienced people drawn from your committee, or may be educators or health and safety professionals from outside. Trainers may be available through colleges or universities, local hospitals or clinics, community organizations, worker advocacy groups, "COSH" groups, international union health and safety departments, or government agencies. You may want to team a committee member and outside professional as co-trainers.

Caution: Bringing in an "expert speaker" instead of a trainer can be a bust. There is nothing empowering about listening to someone show off how much they know or "talk at" people. A good trainer listens more than talks, facilitates rather than lectures.



## 8. Recruit participants.

Identify who should attend the training. Then develop an outreach plan to reach these people. Distribute flyers and run announcements in your organization's newsletter. Make a special effort to identify key people who should attend. Speak to them one-on-one. Include grassroots leaders, potential leaders, stewards, elected union officials, union staff, or other people important in your organization. Their participation is important because it can help connect the training to other campaigns and projects. Also speak to workers who have had direct personal experience with the subject you plan to cover. For example, if you are presenting a workshop on carpal tunnel syndrome, personally invite workers who have been diagnosed with this condition. They can contribute a lot.

## 9. Create a lesson plan.

The planning team should work with the trainer(s) to develop a lesson plan for the chosen topic. It should balance information, skill building, and action. For help with this, see the **Sample Lesson Plan** at the end of this chapter.

Be realistic in estimating the time that various parts of the session will take. Allow enough time for group interaction and participatory activities, so people won't feel they are just being "lectured at." Also set aside ample time to present the action plan you have prepared and to explore new ideas for action. Let people discuss what they're going to do with the information after the training is over. Be sure to have pledge forms, a sign-up sheet, or other means available for participants to express their commitment to follow through.

With the trainer(s), plan the specific content of the session and decide what materials you will use. You may be able to obtain copies of sample training programs, handouts, and other training materials from organizations listed in Appendix 2. Some groups also have audiovisual materials available.

## 10. Conduct the training.

Arrive early to set up, check equipment, and find the location of phones and rest rooms. Have everything in place by the time participants arrive so you can welcome people and get them comfortable and ready.

Participants need to know what to expect and how they will participate. Have the lesson plan and training objectives ready for people to look over. The planning team and/or trainer(s) should prepare an "icebreaker" activity to loosen people up and get them interacting with each other.

Finally, the planning team and trainer(s) should relax and focus on facilitating the session. Remember to include a discussion of the proposed action plan at some point during the session.

## 11. Evaluate the training.

Prepare an evaluation form and ask participants to fill it out at the end of the training. See the **Sample Evaluation Form** at the end of this chapter. Ask how useful specific parts of the training were, how clearly they were presented, and whether people liked the materials. Ask what future training topics they want. Also ask what people are willing to do to help improve conditions. Are they committed to the action plan?

Take some time later at a committee meeting to go over the evaluation forms. What went right and what went wrong? Taking criticism to heart can help you improve future training sessions. Also discuss whether the action plan was well-received or needs to be changed. Who has signed up to participate? Finally, discuss the next steps to advance the campaign.

## 12. Follow up.

If responses on the evaluation were enthusiastic, follow up by proceeding with the next step in the action plan. Be open to changing plans, based on what you've learned from your audience. Contact those who attended the training and see if they are willing to come to a strategy meeting or volunteer for an assignment.

## Tips for Success

### **Encourage people to express themselves.**

Training should be conducted in a way that respects people's own ideas and experiences. Participants should feel free to express their views. Develop ground rules to create a safe and respectful environment.

### **Use interactive methods.**

Avoid long lectures. Audiovisual presentations can be useful, but try to use them in an active way, as “triggers” for group discussion. Break up every training session with frequent activities that let participants work together to solve problems. Use games, role plays, case studies, quizzes, and small group exercises. Consider a “risk mapping” activity where participants draw a map of the workplace and identify hazards, or a “body mapping” activity where they identify various health symptoms. (For details, see Chapters 4 and 5, **Find the Hazards** and **Identify Health Problems**.)

### **Make the content personal.**

Encourage participants to connect what they are learning to their own lives and jobs. Here are some examples of questions to ask throughout the training:

- What experience have you had with this issue?

- Why is this issue a problem for you?
- Who do you think has the power to solve this problem?
- Why hasn't this problem been adequately addressed before?
- What should be done about this problem?
- How would you move this idea into action?
- Does anyone have a different point of view?

These are sometimes called “probing” questions. They are intended to promote critical thinking.

### **Consider making it a “train the trainer” session.**

It's a great idea to empower stewards, activists, and other worker-leaders to present their own similar training for co-workers later. If you include material in your class on teaching techniques and how to train, you'll enlarge your pool of trainers and will eventually be able to reach more people.

### **Aim for action.**

Instructors who use the “training for action” approach sometimes speak of a “hierarchy” of training objectives. These proceed from the most basic objective, giving information, to more complex and challenging objectives like promoting social action. One version of this hierarchy is shown below. The trainer should:

- **Provide knowledge** about health and safety issues
- **Build skills** to recognize and resolve problems
- **Strengthen commitment** to health and safety
- **Promote collective action** for change in working conditions.

Since you have drawn up an action plan, keep it at center stage throughout the training session. Remind people that the training won't be very valuable unless they make use of the information to work for change.

## TRAINING WORKSHEET

*Use this worksheet to record your training plans as you go through the “Step by Step” section of this chapter.*

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. The purpose of this training is:
  
2. We will find out what participants most need by:
  
3. The topic will be:
  
4. We have completed a draft action plan and it has been reviewed by:
  
5. The individuals who will organize the training are:
  
6. The resources we will need (equipment, materials, room, release time, etc.) include:
  
7. We will obtain these resources from:
  
8. The date, time, and location will be:
  
9. The trainers will be:
  
10. We will recruit participants by:
  
11. The lesson plan has been reviewed and approved by:
  
12. The training will be evaluated by:
  
13. Participants will be contacted about follow-up actions by:

# HEALTH AND SAFETY TRAINING SURVEY

Choose one or more topics or skills that you would like the training to address.

## Topics:

- |  |                                      |   |  |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> asbestos        | <input type="checkbox"/> fire safety | <input type="checkbox"/> infectious disease | <input type="checkbox"/> staffing              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> lead            | <input type="checkbox"/> machinery   | <input type="checkbox"/> stress             | <input type="checkbox"/> workers' compensation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> toxic chemicals | <input type="checkbox"/> noise       | <input type="checkbox"/> breaks             | <input type="checkbox"/> fall protection       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> hazardous waste | <input type="checkbox"/> vehicles    | <input type="checkbox"/> long hours         | <input type="checkbox"/> violence              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> respirators     | <input type="checkbox"/> lighting    | <input type="checkbox"/> work pace          | <input type="checkbox"/> ergonomics            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ventilation     | <input type="checkbox"/> heat/cold   | <input type="checkbox"/> speedup            | <input type="checkbox"/> emergency response    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____    |                                      |   |  |

## Skills:

- How to file an OSHA complaint
- How to negotiate health and safety language in a contract
- How to investigate hazards
- How to eliminate or reduce hazards
- How to involve and mobilize other workers
- How to communicate effectively with management
- How to develop relationships with the media
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Your Needs:

Why do you want training on these subjects and what will you do with the information?

What previous health and safety training have you had?

What time works best for you?  Evenings  Weekends  Weekdays

# SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_ Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: FROM: \_\_\_\_\_ TO: \_\_\_\_\_ Total available training time: \_\_\_\_\_

Time(s)	Trainer(s)	Activity and Method	Materials
		<p><b>Welcome and Introductions.</b></p> <p>Go around the room and have people give their name, job, and what they hope to get out of this training.</p>	
		<p><b>Explain Purpose and Goals of the Training.</b></p> <p>Summarize the lesson plan.</p>	<p>Show flipchart with objectives.</p> <p>Distribute the lesson plan.</p>
		<p><b>Conduct "Icebreaker" Activity.</b></p> <p>Play a game to get people interacting with each other.</p>	
		<p><b>Present Health and Safety Knowledge and Skills Training.</b></p> <p>Give short presentation. Follow with an interactive activity such as a small group exercise with "report backs," then class discussion of group reports.</p>	<p>Distribute selected subject matter training materials.</p> <p>Use flipchart to record "report back" discussion points.</p>
		<p><b>Discuss Action Plan.</b></p> <p>Discuss preliminary Action Plan and get feedback. Revise as necessary.</p> <p>Have each person write down what follow-up action they can commit to and share it with the class. Copy and use these commitments later to organize follow-up activities.</p>	<p>Distribute preliminary Action Plan.</p> <p>Distribute and collect individual pledge forms or a sign-up sheet.</p>
		<p><b>Evaluate the Training.</b></p>	<p>Distribute and collect Evaluation Forms.</p>
		<p><b>Award Certificates. (optional)</b></p>	<p>Distribute certificates of completion to participants.</p>

# SAMPLE EVALUATION FORM

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How would you rate this training overall? (Check one)

Excellent     Very good     Good     Average     Below average

2. What did you find most useful about this training?

3. What did you find least useful?

4. How could this training be improved?

5. Do you have any comments on the materials that were used?

6. Please rate specific training activities such as videos, games, lectures, etc.  
(Circle 1 to 5, with 5 as the highest rating)

(a) \_\_\_\_\_ 1    2    3    4    5

(b) \_\_\_\_\_ 1    2    3    4    5

(c) \_\_\_\_\_ 1    2    3    4    5

7. Are you interested in more health and safety training? On what topics?

8. Will you participate in efforts to make the workplace safer?     Yes     No

9. Do you have any comments on the Action Plan that was discussed at the training?

10. Any other comments?