

Capacity Building for Health and Safety Monitoring and Problem Solving in China

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The goal of this project is to build the capacity of plant workers, factory environmental, health and safety (EH&S) managers, local NGOs and worker organizations to accurately evaluate EH&S conditions in footwear and garment factories in China, and to support the development of innovative strategies to improve conditions in these factories.

The centerpiece of the project is a series of workshops in southern China and Hong Kong to train workers, NGOs, and factory personnel on health and safety monitoring techniques and problem-solving strategies. The project will produce short-term benefits by improving conditions in several factories in China. The project will have longer-term benefits by building the capacity of workers, communities, and NGOs to play a sustained and expanding role in workplace improvement efforts. The project will also provide new opportunities for collaboration and problem-solving between stakeholders.

We are currently seeking feedback all aspects of the proposed project.

Project Plan

Phase One of the project will involve conducting a needs assessment with proposed participants, and designing the training curriculum and instruction materials which will be translated into Chinese

Phase Two will involve conducting two concurrent 4-days trainings in China.

Phase Three will involve evaluation of the trainings, interviews with key participants on next steps, and design of future "train the trainer" sessions and possible monitoring pilots.

Activities

- (1) **Support Worker Members of Factory Health and Safety Committees.** We will work directly with designated worker and manager committee members to strengthen their hazard recognition and evaluation skills. At a plant without an existing health and safety committee, we will help establish a committee on a departmental level and train the members through short courses, including "train the trainers" sessions. The trainings will have both short-term

goals to improve hazard recognition and evaluation skills, and longer-term objectives to strengthen broader worker participation.

We will develop a training manual in Chinese that is geared towards worker EH&S committee members and that will be useful for workers throughout the plant and the industry.

In the future, at another plant where a health and safety committee already exists, we will evaluate the structure of the committee, how workers are chosen, what role they play, and what impact they can have. A training, similar to the one described above, will be designed to sharpen their hazard recognition and evaluation skills, and to maximize the effectiveness of the committee.

- (2) **Support Local NGOs in Hong Kong and Southern China.** We will work with NGOs based in Hong Kong and southern China to build their capacity on health, safety, and environmental issues. These groups will be invited to send participants to the factory-based training. In addition, we will conduct short “train the trainer” sessions in the areas of occupational and environmental health so that these groups can more effectively support local worker and community-based groups in southern China.

We will work closely with the Chinese Working Women’s Network (CWN) and the Labour Rights in China (LARIC) coalition (AMRC, HKCIC, HKCTU, CLB), to identify groups and individuals interested in environment, health, and safety training. These trainings will similarly involve time in a class room setting and time on the factory floor learning about hazard recognition strategies, chemical exposures, etc.

Structure of the Trainings

Our current plan for the initial training is a 4-day session at one factory in southern China. adidas has expressed a willingness to make the YY-II plant in Dong Guan City available for the first training. In addition to adidas’ managers and plant workers, we will invite participants from the Nike section of the YY complex in Doan Guan and participants from a nearby Reebok contractor facility. Participants would also be invited from the Chinese Working Women’s Network staff in China and the LARIC groups in Hong Kong.

The YY plant is a huge facility with 13,000 workers in the adidas section alone and 60,000 workers in the entire complex. Because of the scale of operations, we are proposing to select participants from just one department, and the same department from each of the three plants, so as to have a common frame of reference for the training activities, and to create a critical mass of participants able to establish functioning worker-management health and safety committees in this department in each of the plants. Over the course of the 4-day training, sessions and activities would alternate between a classroom setting and the actual factory floor at YY II where field exercises would be conducted.

The “Assembly” department of these factories might be a good choice for the training site, as there are a wide range of hazards present, including: chemical exposures, noise, ergonomics,

machine operations, evacuation and fire plans, among others. Its size and range of manufacturing processes would also make it an interesting area in which to establish pilot health and safety committees.

The training participants would then consist of 15 workers and 5 managers from each of the three companies (all from the same department in their respective plants) and 15 participants from the CWN and LARIC combined, for a total of approximately 75 participants. We will conduct a thorough needs assessment with proposed participants before finalizing the training. Among the likely topics are hazard recognition, chemical exposure evaluation and controls, noise, ergonomics, safety, reproductive hazards, stress, personal protective equipment, effective hazard controls, and problem-solving strategies.

Because our trainings are interactive and participatory, the maximum number of participants in any one class is 35-40 people. We are considering running two identical training sessions concurrently because of the cost and time involved in traveling to China. This would involve using one set of trainers for both sessions, and staggering sessions during overlapping 4-day trainings. One training might run from Monday to Thursday, while the second would run from Wednesday to Saturday.

Research Component

The trainings will be complemented by research and evaluations of broader strategies for improving workplace health and safety practices. Among the subject areas for this research are:

- Analysis of current systems for worker complaints and participation in health, safety and environmental issues;
- Analysis of the effectiveness of current health and safety committees;
- Analysis of current strategies for monitoring, including consulting firm monitoring, internal company monitoring, worker committee monitoring, and NGO monitoring.
- Exploration of other possible strategies for monitoring and verification of factory conditions.

Progress to Date and Next Steps

We have visited Hong Kong and southern China three times over the last nine months to evaluate training needs, pilot strategies, and factory sites for the trainings and exercises. We have received positive indications from two of the three proposed companies regarding their participation. We have also received strong interest from the leading NGOs in Hong Kong to participate in the project.

Assuming there is a consensus among proposed participants about the general concept for the initial training, the Phase One needs assessment process and materials development would occur during the fall of 2000. The first training would be organized in early 2001.