

Pulp truth

Issue 35 • May 3, 2011



Please copy Pulp Truth front and back and distribute it during non-work time using your Communications and Action Teams, steward system or Rapid Response network. Be sure to leave copies in lunchrooms, break rooms, etc. We want to hear what's happening in your workplace. Send your news to lbaker@usw.org

Paper Workers Kick Off Season of Safety Campaign

USW paper members wore “Fix the Hazards” stickers on Workers Memorial Day April 28 to show they are committed to introducing a hazards-based approach into the paper industry so hazards can be fixed before a worker is killed or injured on the job.

Paper locals also handed out two leaflets on safety and how to connect with USW paper activities and news. Each local was given a safety poster to hang up in the workplace or union hall and a copy of the paper safety video to show the membership in May.

Workers Memorial Day was designated a National Day of Action to begin our year-long Season of Safety campaign entitled “Uncover the Hazards, Don’t Paper Them Over.”

The paper industry too often fixes the immediate cause of an accident while papering over the underlying

root causes. As a result, hazards don’t get addressed, lessons learned aren’t passed on and similar accidents happen again.

Too often workers get blamed for accidents when the focus should be on finding the hazards and fixing them.

Our Season of Safety campaign aims to build safety activism, create awareness of the hazards-based approach, and put safety at the forefront of collective bargaining.

Thirty-six workers were killed in USW-represented paper mills and converting plants since the April 2005 merger between the Steelworkers and PACE. Countless others have been injured on the job. We owe it to those workers to make our workplaces safer. The life you save may be your own.

Paper Mill Safety Report Reveals Need for Hazard-Based Analysis

Too many deaths and injuries in the paper industry prompted our union to create the Paper Research Action Project (RAP) and begin surveying safety and health conditions in USW-represented mills. Local union leaders and safety activists at 173 USW-represented mills completed the Paper RAP survey.

Seven areas were looked at in the survey: union involvement in safety and health; work design; process safety and emergency response; combustible and toxic dusts; machine guarding and lockout/tagout; counter-productive behavioral safety programs; and safety and health training.

The Paper RAP report entitled *Papered Over, Safety and Health in U.S. Paper Mills* detailed the survey’s findings and offered recommendations for action.

Overall, the findings showed the paper industry lacks an understanding about what really causes accidents.

The industry can be safe, but it requires commitment and hard work by management and the union.

Union Involvement in Safety & Health

Survey findings showed that management dominates many joint labor-management safety and health committees; local unions have extremely limited involvement at the committee level; and paper locals believe committee members need more effective training.

Recommendations for improvement included negotiating model safety and health contract language; additional and better safety and health training for the locals and staff reps.; collaboration with Unite through Workers Uniting; and establishing strong union-only committees and joint labor-management committees in every local.

Work Design

How management designs and organizes work can impact the risk of injuries and illnesses. The survey revealed that changes in work design and restructuring are leading to safety and health problems, such as man-

(continued on back)

(continued from front)

agement's decision to not fix the problem and have employees work around the safety and health hazard.

The Paper RAP recommended that local unions and staff representatives receive training and support on work design and how it affects safety and health. Also, the ability of locals to handle work design issues through bargaining and continuous bargaining (in-between contracts) needs to be improved.

Process Safety & Emergency Response

Process safety refers to preventing fires, explosions and major releases of hazardous chemicals from tanks, vessels and piping where they are used or stored. Unlike personal safety—which aims to prevent accidents like trips, falls and getting caught in equipment—process safety refers to items like excellent inspection and maintenance, good instrumentation and work procedures that allow process operators to quickly shut down runaway reactions or releases.

Survey results indicated that large volumes of highly hazardous chemicals like chlorine and chlorine dioxide exist at many sites. Respondents at a majority of the chlorine/chlorine dioxide sites rated all process safety management systems, except for one, as less than very effective. A majority of the most hazardous sites were not fully prepared to respond to an emergency and many sites had inadequate emergency response training.

To reduce the potential for catastrophic chemical accidents, the Paper RAP recommended that inherently safer technologies be used and that local unions and members receive training to prevent and respond to such incidents.

Combustible and Toxic Dusts

If enough dried pulp, paper and wood dust gets into the air it can be explosive. Workplace exposure to this dust also can cause occupational disease in pulp and paper workers.

The survey findings revealed that dust hazards are common and that most of the sites rated their systems for controlling dust as less than very effective.

The Paper RAP recommended that training be given to the local unions to increase their awareness of the dust hazards and the tools they can use to reduce the risk. The union also will continue its push for a strong OSHA combustible dust standard that involves workers and their representatives.

Machine Guarding and Lockout/Tagout

Survey results indicated that unguarded machinery is common in paper mill operations and that workers are repeatedly in danger during threading. Design and engineering for safe threading is often missing. Respondents reported that managers allowed work on machinery and equipment without ensuring Lockout/Tagout (LOTO)

was in place when required. They also allowed the usage of less effective measures rather than LOTO.

To correct these problems, the Paper RAP recommended that training be given to local unions to build awareness of machine hazards, machine guarding, LOTO and OSHA requirements. Also, lessons learned from other industries, such as the union's campaign for safer machinery in the rubber industry, should be applied.

Counterproductive Behavioral Safety Programs

A majority of sites reported that their company's health and safety programs focused on employee behavior instead of finding the hazards and controlling them. These behavioral programs consisted of employees watching each other for unsafe acts, safety incentive programs for time without reports of injuries or illnesses, and post-accident drug testing and discipline.

Union solidarity is undermined in these programs and workers don't report accidents for fear of discipline and not getting the incentive reward. Without reporting there is no opportunity to investigate for the root causes, fix the hazards and prevent the same incident from happening again.

Pushing for effective union-driven safety and health programs was recommended. Not only do they get workers involved in safety in a productive way, they focus on finding the hazards and fixing them.

Safety and Health Training

Respondents reported that they lacked confidence in their employers' safety and health training to help them contribute effectively to mill safety and health on a range of key issues, such as identifying and assessing hazards, handling hazardous materials and machine safeguarding. They expressed strong interest in the USW's safety and health training.

The Paper RAP recommended the USW ensure the paper locals have access to the safety and health programs available from the Tony Mazzocchi Center for Health, Safety and Environmental Education (TMC). The TMC also should consider developing programs specific to the paper industry. If you would like to know more about the TMC, go to www.uswtmc.org

Read the complete Papered Over, Safety and Health in U.S. Paper Mills report at www.usw.org/paperworkers.

Appendices to the report can be found at www.usw.org/paperRAP.