

(RE) DISCOVERING THAT
*WORK CAN BE DANGEROUS
TO YOUR HEALTH: THE
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH
MOVEMENT IN THE
UNITED STATES, 1970-2000*

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Current Research Projects

- *Work and the Body Politic:
Gender, Workplace Risk, and
the Health of Democracy*
- *Voices in the Commons:
Mobilizing Teachers and
Nurses for Democracy in Crisis
Times*

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THE POSTWAR WORKPLACE: NEW SCIENCE, NEW RISKS

- After World War II, a “chemical revolution” changed how the United States raised food, produced goods, and treated bodies
- Expanded construction and private transportation created new markets for consumer goods
- Increased automation and faster pace of work created higher risks of occupational injury
- Research and development in chemistry, engineering, epidemiology, and pharmaceuticals created new understanding of diseases
- New environmental science discovered connections between chemical and biological agents and disease



DUAL ORIGINS: THE NEW ENVIRONMENTALISM AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SCIENCE

- Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) spurred environmental debates that re-energized older conservation groups, such as Sierra Club and new environmental organizations.
- Environmental science begins investigating incidence and origin of cancer
- Community and workplace connections
- Increases in Occupational Disease: Black Lung, Brown Lung, Silicosis, Cancers
- New Labor Union Campaigns



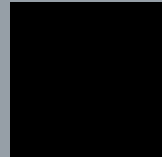
THE PUBLICATION OF *SILENT SPRING* (1962)



Rachel Carson (1907-1964), a marine biologist, whose main employment was in the Department of Natural Resources, began investigating the impact of a new pesticide, DDT, used to control mosquito populations



Carson was the first to publicize links between use of chemical pesticides and environmental damage, specifically impact on birds, insects, animals, vegetation



The publication of *Silent Spring* is credited with spurring the environmental movement in the United States.

ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS IN THE UNITED STATES

Earth Day (1970)

Clean Air Act
(1970)

Creation of
Environmental
Protection Agency
(1970)

Occupational
Safety and Health
Act (1970)
creates OSHA

Clean Water Act
(1972)

Federal
Environmental
Pesticide Control
Act (1972)

National Institute
for Occupational
Safety and Health
(research)

SCIENTIFIC ORIGINS OF THE NEW WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENTALISM

Ernst Wynder (1922-1999), epidemiology and public health, author of 1950 study (with Evarts Ambrose Graham) on tobacco and lung cancer. Founder of Institute for Cancer Prevention and American Health Foundation

Irving Selikoff (1915-1992) – connection between asbestos and lung cancer and disease in the 1960s

Harriet Hardy (1906-1993), toxicologist and occupational medical research, focused on hazards of nuclear energy, beryllium, mercury poisoning

Vilma Hunt (1926-2012), anthropologist, public health, radiation biology, studying effects of lead, benzene, radiation

Jeanne Stellman, physical chemist and medical researcher, occupational health advocate, author of *Work is Dangerous for Your Health* (1973), and editor of current ILO *Encyclopedia of Occupational Health and Safety*

Protecting
the HEALTH of
**EIGHTY MILLION
AMERICANS**

*What is it
7 million*

A NATIONAL GOAL FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

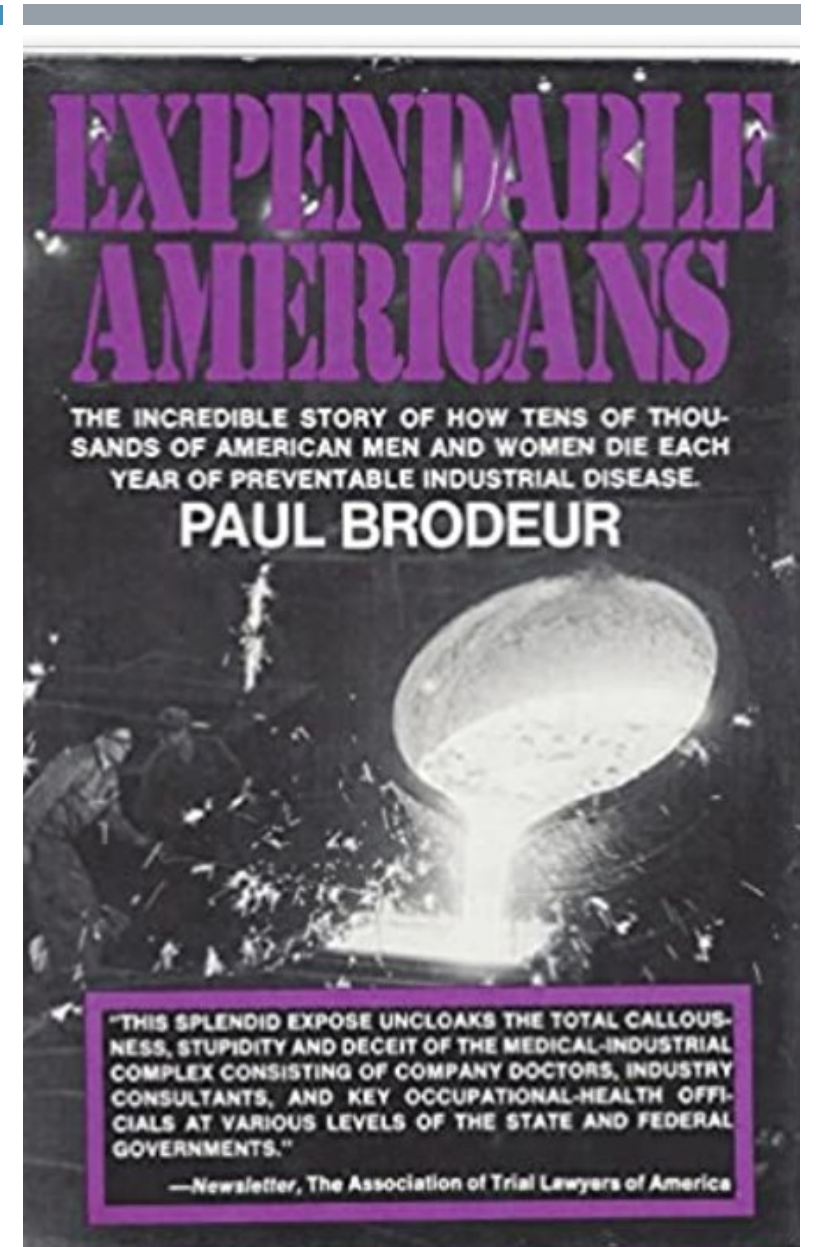


OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY: A NEW ISSUE?

- "In the last 25 years, more than 400,000 Americans were killed by work-related accidents and disease, and close to 50 million more suffered disabling injuries on the job," he pointed out during the debate. "Not only has this resulted in incalculable pain and suffering for workers and their families, but such injuries have cost billions of dollars in lost wages and production."
- Rep. William Steiger, 1970

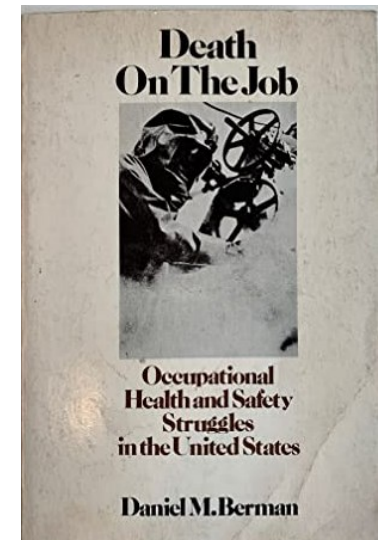
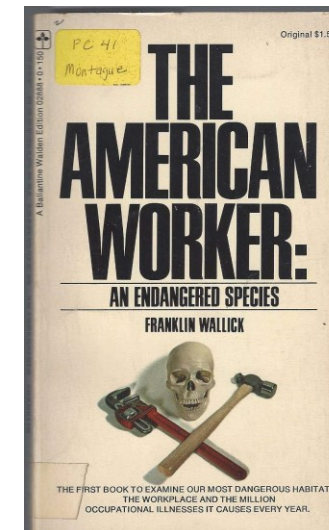
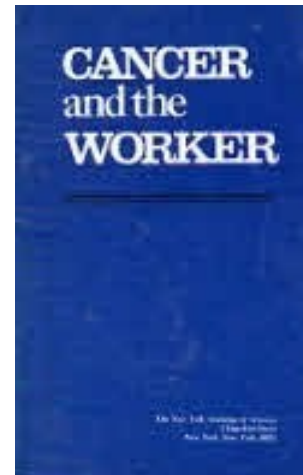
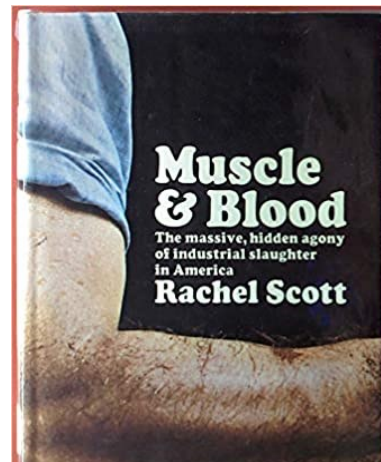
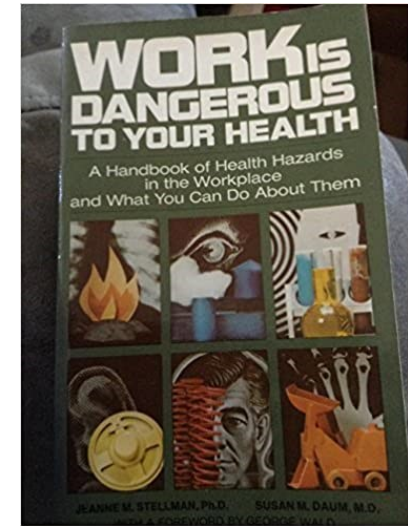
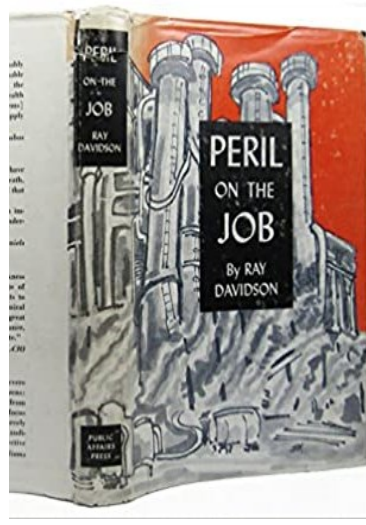
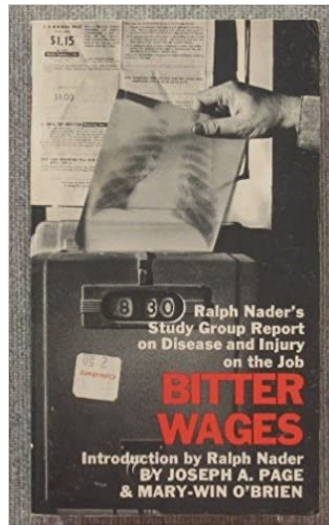
SIGNS, PORTENTS, AND MASS MEDIA

- Investigative journalist Paul Brodeur published a series of articles on the impact of asbestos and other chemical carcinogens on American workers, focusing on an asbestos plant in Tyler, Texas, and the early efforts to create a federal agency to regulate working conditions.
- According to Dan Berman in *Death on the Job*, "Paul Brodeur's *New Yorker* series (later published as *Expendable Americans*) on the asbestos poisoning of OCAW workers at a Pittsburgh-Corning plant in Tyler, Texas, was first made possible by Mazzocchi's careful cultivation of the media.
- Only Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" series has ever generated more reader letters to the *New Yorker*."



"AN EPIDEMIC OF OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES AND DISEASES": A NEW DISCOVERY?

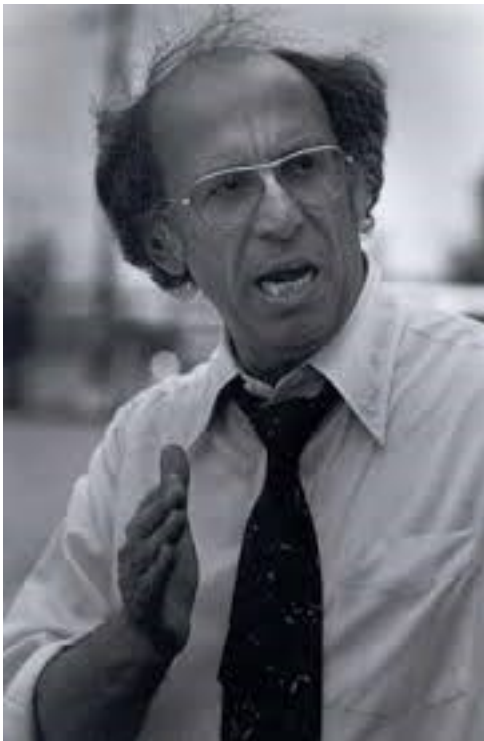
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TURNING POINTS IN OSHA'S FIRST DECADE

- April 1971, Occupational Safety and Health Administration established under the Williams-Steiger Act of 1970.
- May 1971, OSHA establishes first consensus standards, setting permissible limits for over 400 toxic substances, followed by original standards for asbestos, lead, carcinogens, and cotton dust in the first decade.
- From 1971 to 1973 AFL-CIO trains more than 10,000 workers; 35 of its 116 unions hire health and safety officers
- In 1973, OSHA announces that “Unions Set Safety and Health Goal: Work without Fear.”
- In 1977, “Unhealthy Jobs,” reported over 390,000 new cases a year of occupational disease per year and 100,000 occupational-disease-related deaths.
- By 1979, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) organized a conference, *Lost in the Workplace*, asking the question, “Is There an Occupational Disease Epidemic?”
- In 1980, newly elected Ronald Reagan promises deregulation to “minimize regulatory burdens.”
- Unions become major drivers of new workplace standards.

”PERIL ON THE JOB”: OIL, CHEMICAL AND ATOMIC WORKERS (OCAW) AND LABOR ENVIRONMENTALISM



Beginning in 1970s, OCAW started to address increased incidence of asbestosis, cancer, and other fatal diseases found among their workers in a range of industries—paint and chemicals, oil refineries, etcetera



Anthony Mazzochi (1926-2002), a union activist (later Vice President in OCAW), started using environmental workplace hazards and occupational injuries in organizing campaigns



Mazzochi recruited Jeanne Stellman, a physical chemist, to become the labor movement’s first occupational health officer

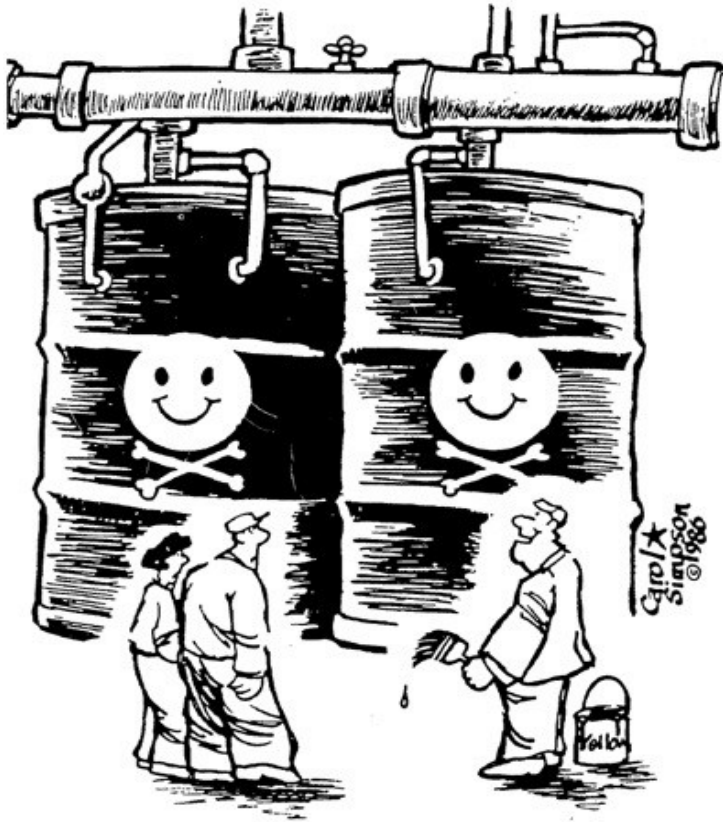


OCAW won several organizing drives in the 1970s and eventually turned attention to nuclear power plants



1973 Boycott of Shell Oil and the BASF strike

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY CAMPAIGNS



“After the latest CANCER scare, we thought you needed a little cheering up.”



Fight for compensation for Black Lung (UMW)



Silicosis and Asbestosis



United Auto Workers War on Cancer



Textile Workers Brown Lung

STREET-LEVEL EPIDEMIOLOGY: WORKERS AND ACTIVISTS REDISCOVERING RISKS

Local Unions note patterns of occupational disease and illness (UAW, UMW, Teamsters, Steel Workers, OCAW)

Medical Committee for Human Rights (MCHR) takes civil rights advocacy to community health care and the workplace

Creation of Occupational Safety and Health Administration sparks the creation of local COSH groups (Chicago, Boston, Detroit, elsewhere)

Alliances between health care workers, scientists, and workers lead to further data collection and analysis of work-related chronic diseases and injuries

Nurses and hospital workers organize around workplace concerns—nurse-patient ratios, standards of care, physical strain and needlestick injuries, etc., through SEIU and other advocacy groups

“A UNION PROGRAM ON JOB HEALTH & SAFETY”



- During the summer of 1970, members of Teamsters Local 688 and Daniel Berman, Alliance for Labor Action, developed a job safety and health program,
- They believed that without a strong demand and worker participation, OSHA was toothless.
- Berman and Local 688 created a seven-step program to identify and eliminate occupational hazards
- At the heart of their method was worker participation in identifying hazards. They believed that since workers were the ones affected by hazards in the workplace, workers alone had the power to change those conditions.
- 1972 Berman with Medical Committee for Human Rights organizes Health in the Workplace Conference

DRUM (DODGE REVOLUTIONARY UNION MOVEMENT)



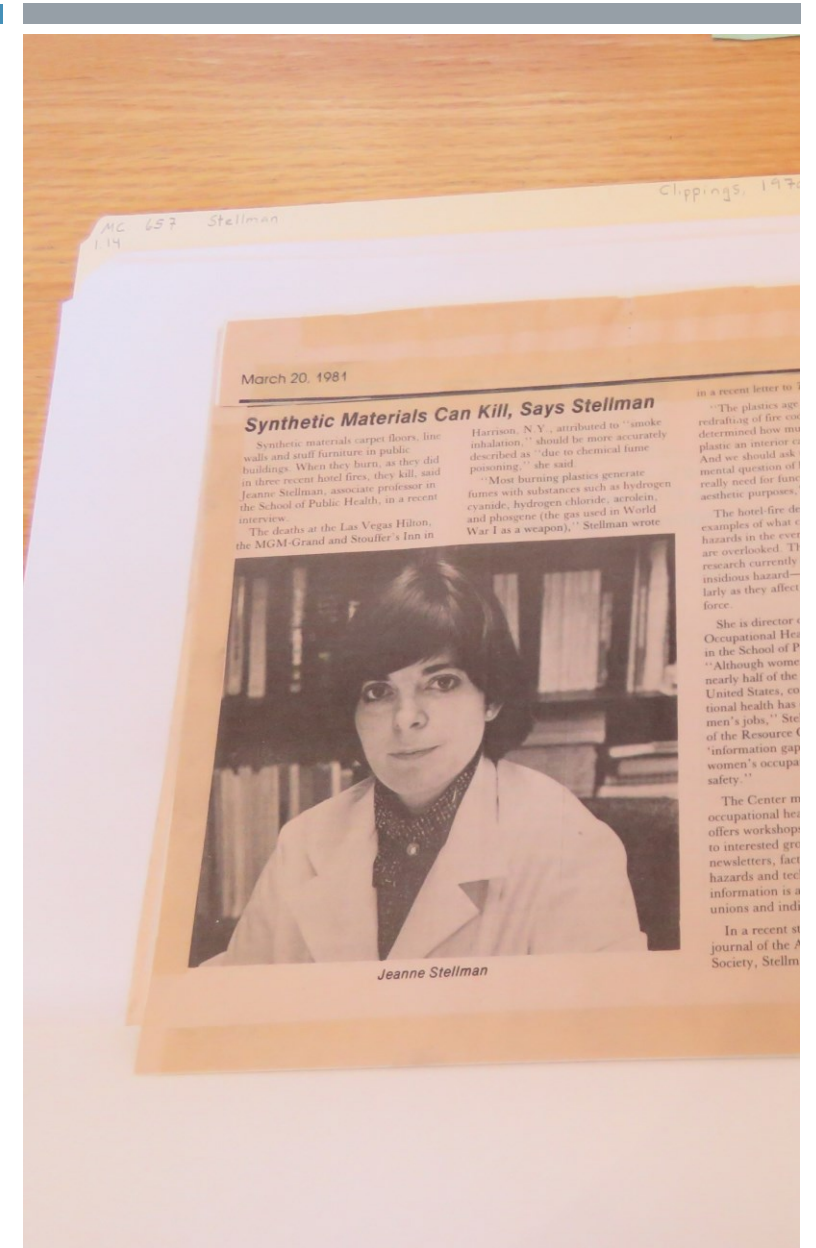
- Surkin and Georgakis, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, describe a dissenting union movement in Detroit, and the creation of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement. Less well studied was the focus DRUM gave occupational health and safety and to health care.
- Formed after a series of spontaneous wildcat strikes over production-line speedups at the Dodge Main plant in May 1968, the DRUM issued a 14-point program, highlighting health and safety issues.
- As the movement spread, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers was formed. One of the major concerns of the League was occupational health and safety. Working conditions at the Eldon Avenue Gear and Axle plant pushed workers to the breaking point.

DRUM, OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH, AND HEALTH CARE WORKERS

- **Among DRUM's 14-Points:**
 - Point 2. "We demand that the grievance procedure be completely revised so that grievances are settled immediately on the job by the workers in the plant involved..."
 - Point 3. Elimination of all safety and health hazards in the auto industry. This means cleaning the air in the foundry and redesigning dangerous machinery and cut back in production on hazardous jobs.
 - Point 4. The union must fight vigorously against speed up and increase in production standards..."
- **Hospital Workers and Nurses** organizing in Detroit worked with DRUM and the LRBW. Edna Watson, among others, was connected to MCHR and organized Detroit hospital workers. Their grievances included unsafe working conditions.

WOMEN'S OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH RESEARCH

- The re-generation of occupational health and medicine in the 1970s re-established gendered occupational medical practice in the work of the post-World War II generation of women medical researchers in the United States.
- Most previous occupational health studies focused on men.
- Along with Vilma Hunt, Eula Bingham, Harriet Hardy, and Andrea Hricko, Jeanne Stellman (right) revitalized the contemporary study of women's occupational health.
- They collectively challenged ideas about women's employment, their capacity for work, and the impact of reproductive health hazards on both men and women in industries.



THE OSHA LEAD STANDARD

- Congressional hearings on the proposed OSHA lead standard brought occupational health experts, women's organizations, and trade unions to demand a lead standard to protect all workers and to challenge fetal protection policies and workplace limits.
- Testimony revealed that the new proposed lead standard failed to protect men and women workers by declining to mandate what constituted safe exposure to lead in the workplace
- They argued the proposed OSHA standard endangered the reproductive health of all workers.



FETAL PROTECTION POLICIES

AFTER AMERICAN CYNAMID ADOPTED A FETAL PROTECTION POLICY, FIVE WOMEN WORKERS AT THE FIRM CHOSE TO BE STERILIZED IN ORDER TO RETAIN THEIR JOBS, A RESULT LATER CHALLENGED IN THE *JOHNSON CONTROLS CASE*



In the United States, employer response to Title VII varied, but a central theme was in the use of fetal protection policies to barred fertile women—or all women—from jobs that were viewed as hazardous.

Policies defined the risk in terms of women's reproductive capacity; they also were used were to avoid more extensive mediation of toxic levels of chemical exposure.

Occupational health expert Vilma Hunt argued in 1974 that "We are all responsible for the health of future generations and we can no longer ignore a fact of life—reproduction and work are women's lot."

Johnson Controls (1991) decision saw fetal protection policies as discriminatory, since they did not take into account occupational hazards that affected men's reproductive capacity.

OFFICE WORK ALSO CAN BE DANGEROUS TO YOUR HEALTH

- The Automated Office new hazards
 - Repetitive Stress Injury
 - Back and muscle strain
 - VDT (video display terminals)
 - Carcinogens in office equipment and supplies (printer toner, for example)
 - "Sick Buildings" – ventilation hazards, cancer clusters, building and construction materials (asbestos, dust)
 - Stress



EXPANDING THE DEFINITION OF WORKPLACE HAZARDS IN THE CONTEMPORARY UNITED STATES



Blood-Borne Pathogens (especially in Health Care and Hospitals), such as exposure to hepatitis B or HIV/AIDS



Ergonomics—Physical Injuries in the Workplace, including repetitive stress



Workplace Stress



Workplace Violence



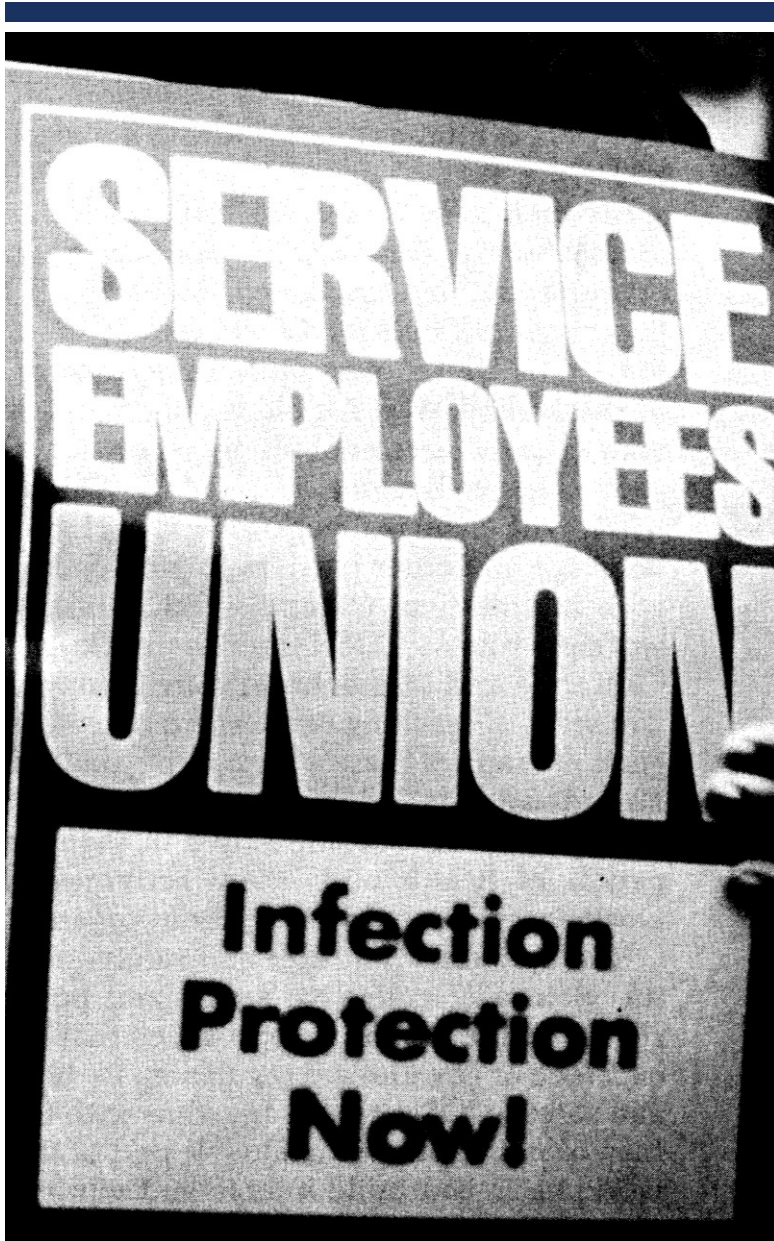
Workplace Bullying



Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

NEW WORKPLACE EXPOSURES: NEEDLESTICK INJURIES, HEPATITIS-B, HIV-AIDS

- 1983 10,000 Health Care Workers Infected at the Workplace via needlestick injuries with Hepatitis-B. OSHA issues guidelines; SEIU Local 250 prints, *Can We Talk?*; AIDS Education Project begins
- 1986 SEIU/AFSCME lobby for blood-borne pathogen standard
- 1987 First documented HIV occupational transmission San Francisco General Hospital
- 1988 *New England Journal of Medicine* article – 90% injuries preventable; safer sharps
- 1989 “We Are All Jane Doe” campaigns for needlestick safety
- 1990 More documented occupational transmissions among nurses and health care workers
- 1991 First Blood-Borne Pathogen Standard (OSHA)
- 1990s Petitions for the passage of needlestick injury prevention laws; lobbying for state laws; SEIU protests and campaigns; California first state law



NURSES AND THE NEEDLESTICK INJURY PREVENTION ACT BLOOD-BORNE PATHOGENS PROTECTION IN THE HEPATITIS-B AND HIV/AIDS CRISIS

Signing of the Needlestick Safety and Prevention Act



Attendees included BD's head of Public Relations and leaders of the American Nurses Association, yet we still have unsafe needles. Speak up to enforce the law!



OSHA's Bloodborne Pathogens Standard

... and Needlestick Safety and Prevention Act
... and the OSHA 300 Log



NIOSH Celebrates Nursing Safety and Health

This blog is part of a series hosted by NIOSH to commemorate 2020 Year of the Nurse

5 WAYS TO PREVENT SHARPS AND NEEDLESTICK INJURIES

- 1 Plan safe handling and disposal before any procedure.
- 2 Use safe and effective needle alternatives when available.
- 3 Activate the device's safety features.
- 4 Immediately dispose of contaminated needles in OSHA-compliant sharps containers.
- 5 Complete bloodborne pathogens training.



osha.gov/sharps

New Occupational Hazards

Health Threats Plague Traditionally Safe and Not-So-Safe Jobs Alike

By **KIRSTIN DOWNEY**
Washington Post Staff Writer

Working at an industrial laundry, where dirty uniforms and linens arrive by the truckload to be chemically cleaned and ironed, is hot, steamy and sometimes dangerous. Sandy Evans, 56, who earns \$8.50 an hour at a plant outside Philadelphia, has the scars to prove it.

There's a dark patch of skin on her wrist, where she burned herself one day in February while operating a 400-degree heat-seal machine that glues company emblems on customers' work uniforms. "It's easy to get burned like this," she said.

In an era of new deadly germs such as infectious hepatitis and AIDS, laundry workers face disease risks as well, hidden among the linens sent out by blood banks and hospitals to be cleaned.

"There's so much contaminated stuff," said Victor Hidalgo, 39, a laundry worker in Connecticut who contends that he was fired from his \$9-an-hour job in January after raising concerns about workers being asked to handle blood-stained garments from a Red Cross blood bank.

Laundry workers aren't alone. Broadly speaking, the U.S.

See **JOBS**, E4, Col. 1

Nurses also have become more active in lobbying. Hundreds of nurses, representing a half-dozen unions, converged on Washington recently to lobby for a bill to increase staffing.

The staff shortage comes as nurses are also being expected to act as front-line shock troops against mysterious new ailments, from antibiotic-resistant infections, to smallpox, anthrax and potentially, SARS.



SIGNS OF THINGS TO COME: NEW BIO-HAZARDS AND THE WORKPLACE
WASHINGTON POST, MAY 28, 2003

THE PANDEMIC AND THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH CRISIS



- The pandemic put occupational health and safety back in focus.
- OSHA issued few new standards to address pandemic conditions; failure of public health measures to improve workplace safety.
- Essential workers were disproportionately affected by the disease, suffering higher rates of infection, especially among service and care workers.
- The health care system has been ground zero in terms of occupational risk and systemic failure to address such risks.
- Nurses and other health care workers have had to work in overcrowded conditions under the pandemic, with inadequate personal protective equipment, facing what were at the beginning unknown risks.

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH:

WORKPLACE ACTIVISM, CHANGING CONTEXTS, NEW RISKS AND UNDERSTANDINGS



- Continuing challenges to improve worker safety
- Health care and education workplaces – new definitions of risk, new safeguards against hazards
- Understaffing as a critical , esp. in health care
- Crumbling infrastructure and workplace hazards
- Outsourcing occupational hazards (new terrains of risk, new grounds for activism)
- Movement from Toxicology to Engineering Approaches, Transition from Control Standards to Process Safety Management
- New generation scientists and researchers