KEY PRIORITY: WORKER HEALTH & SAFETY

SAFETY COMMITTEES & DISPUTE RESOLUTION

“It took community members standing up to protect the health and safety of all workers on the Iberville site.”


THE PRINCIPLE

Workers have the right to a healthy and safe on the job site, but too often that promise is not upheld. Workers should not have to decide between health and safety and supporting themselves and their families. Workers on a job site have a wealth of knowledge about what works and what does not to keep them safe. They should be able to work with employers in a collaborative way to identify and address safety concerns, and be able to raise safety concerns without fear of retaliation. Worker involvement in health and safety is crucial to preventing harm.

THE REASONING

Maintaining healthy and safe jobs sites requires a collaborative approach. Joint worker-employer safety committees provide a space for parties to collaborate to maintain a safe working environment, identify risks, and address problems as they arise. The City should require safety committees, with representatives chosen by workers and employers, on all city contracted construction sites. The City should also grant the Public Construction Commission the ability to engage outside auditors to monitor conditions on public construction sites. Quality dispute resolution mechanisms help workers and supervisors address problems in a constructive manner and provide a predictable and fair disciplinary system.

Construction work is dangerous work, especially in Louisiana. The fatal occupational injury rate for Louisiana is nearly twice the national industry average. In 2011, Louisiana had a fatal occupational injury of 6.3 per 100,000 workers, compared to a rate of 3.5 nationally. The construction and transportation industries are responsible for the most deaths. On average, 26 construction workers die every year in Louisiana.¹

The failure to maintain healthy and safe work sites impacts the broader community. In August 2014, Federal safety inspectors found more than a dozen serious safety violations at the Housing Authority of New Orleans’ Iberville public housing redevelopment construction site. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) cited four construction companies on the site for violations including the failure to provide proper asbestos decontamination facilities and the proper safety equipment for workers handling lead and asbestos.² These violations threaten not only workers, but also their families and communities when inadequately protected workers carry contaminants on their clothing across the city and home with them.