

Latino Immigrant Forestry Services Workers in the Pacific Northwest – Workforce Safety and Sustainability

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**PACIFIC NORTHWEST AGRICULTURAL
SAFETY AND HEALTH CENTER**



**Northwest Forest
Worker Center**



LOHP
LABOR OCCUPATIONAL
HEALTH PROGRAM



Thinning
Burns

Working on Slopes

Clearing Brush

Controlled



Erosion Control

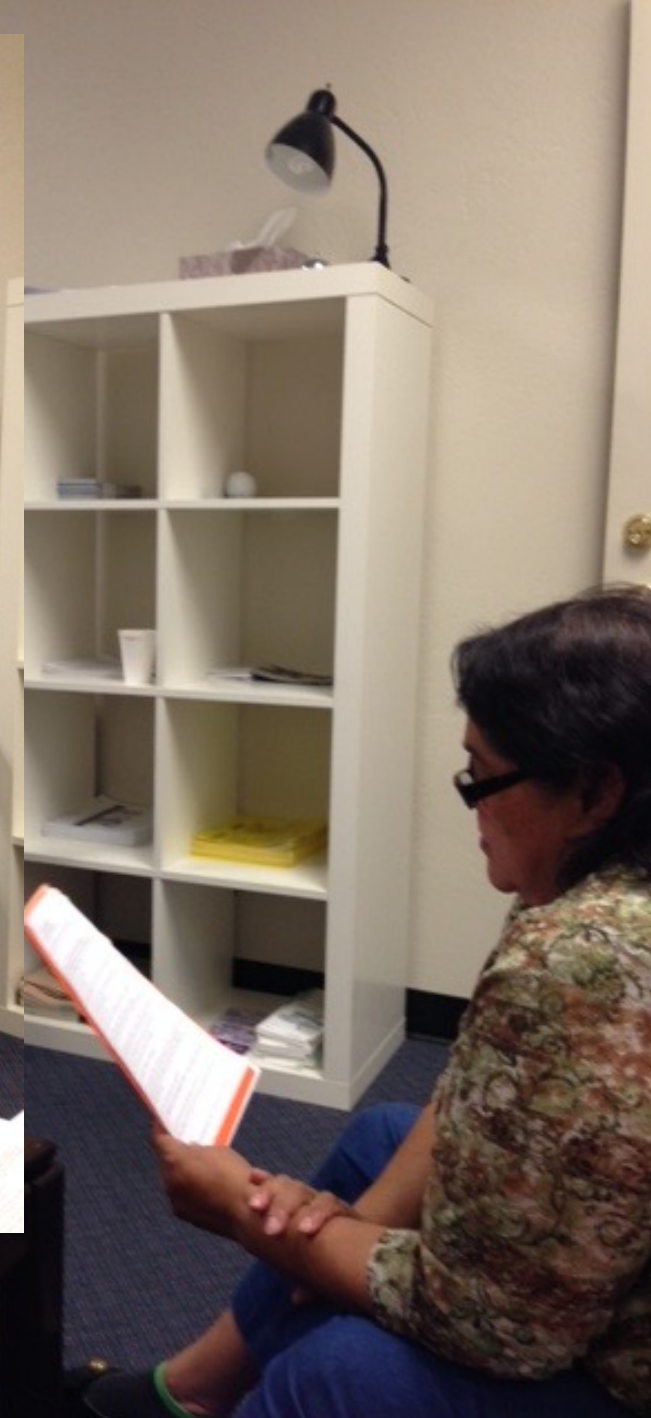
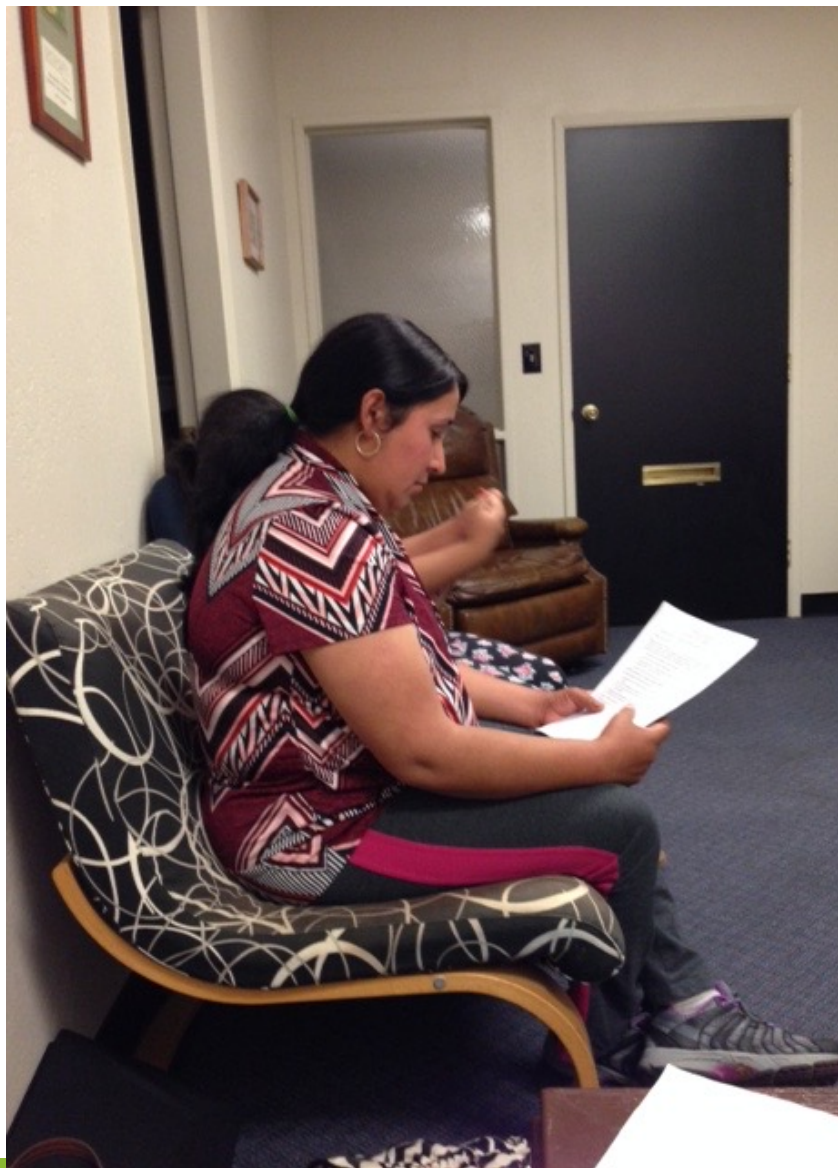


Lifting and Hauling

Working Conditions

- High risk for injury and illness; rarely receive safety training or health benefits
- Heavy, dangerous equipment
- Fast-paced
- Remote, isolated locations; unstable terrain
- Low pay and wage theft
- Employment insecurity





Project Goals

1. Characterize job-related injury and illness experiences in relation to workplace risk factors and outcomes in medical treatment, recovery/return-to-work, and safety mitigation
2. Investigate circumstances under which workers report injuries to supervisors, seek medical care, and make attempts to improve safety and health at work
3. Develop narrative storytelling educational resources for workers and employers
4. Deliver educational trainings; evaluated for effectiveness

Project Phases

- Phase I. Employer, supervisor interviews (n=4, 4); site observations
- Phase II Worker interviews (n=99)
 Case study interviews (n=23)
- Phase III. Developed worker digital stories & worksite safety talks
 Integrated/evaluated digital stories in promotor-led training
 Pilot-test safety talks with supervisors and workers

Technical Advisory Group (Employers & Safety)

- Input on survey tool for employer/supervisor interviews (Phase I)
- Advice on employer/supervisor participant recruitment (Phase I)
- Perspective on worksite observation visits (Phase I)
- Guidance on safety talks and recommendations (Phase III)

Expert Working Group (Workers)

- Input on survey tool for worker interviews (Phase II)
- Advice on worker participant recruitment (Phase II)
- Review (external validation) of preliminary results (Phase II)
- Perspective on training materials and evaluation process (Phase III)



Employer and Supervisor Interviews

Employer & Supervisor Responses

Recommendations

Slower pace of work. Land managers accept that higher costs are needed to support training and a slower pace of work.

Communications. *“Have continuous communication up and down the hierarchy of managers through daily emails; reporting.”* Also, need immediate communications to address unsafe behaviors.

Continuous improvement. Learning is central to safety success. *“Investigate, learn, train. We had an incident where the workers were working too close.... We changed the way we work.”*

Training. *“Regular safety meeting, site plans, crew involvement in site plan.”*

Monitor the industry. Award contracts to those complying with the rules. One suggested more OSHA inspections. *“Migrating companies are not inspected. They can't find the workers. They don't go out to the field. Companies play the odds.”*



Worker Interviews

Profile of Worker Participants (99)

Eligibility: Injured on the job in the previous 2 years or had taken some kind of action to improve working conditions.

- Men with an average age of 30 years.
- All were Spanish speakers, 22 also spoke English.
- At least 15 different forestry services companies were represented in our sample. (Twenty workers did not state their employer's name.)
- Workers had been with their current employer for an average of 3.3 years, and had been working in forestry for 9 years.
- Thirty-seven of the workers were in the United States on H-2B visas.

Table 1: Tasks and Injury Types

Task	Cut	Back Strain	Broken Bone	Sprain	Bruise	Puncture Wound	Head Injury	Heat Illness	Pesticide	Musculo-skeletal	Total
Thinning	11	2	7	3	2		1				26
Planting		5	1		1					1	8
Brushing	4		1			1					6
Piling		2		2				1			5
Axe work	1	1									2
Sawing		1									1
Applying Pesticides									1		1
Other	1										1
Total	17	11	9	6	3	1		1	1	1	51

Struck-By-Object

WORKING TOO CLOSE TOGETHER

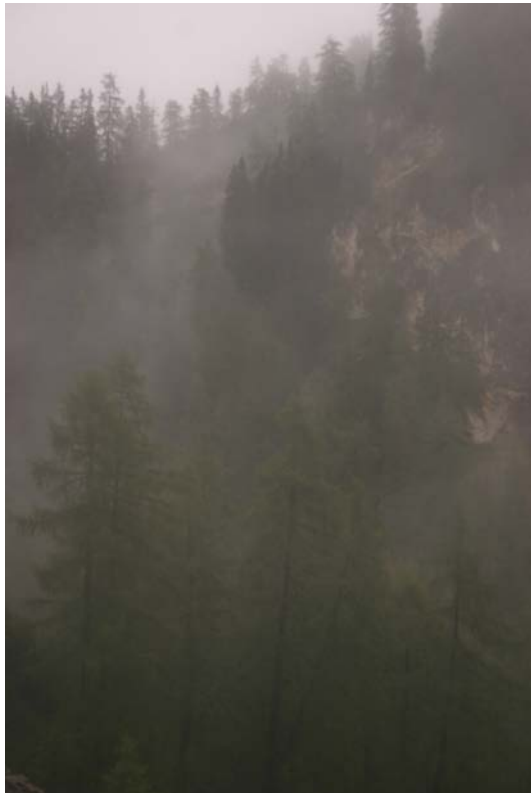


LACK OF COMMUNICATION



Slips, Trips, & Falls

LOW VISIBILITY



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT: WET, STEEP SLOPES



Chainsaw Kickback

SAW TIP HITTING AN OBJECT



REACHING TOO HIGH



Back Strain

PILING HEAVY BRUSH



FATIGUE



JUMPING



HARD GROUND

Underlying Causes: Safety Climate Factors Affecting Injuries

- Abusive supervision – 29% of interviewees
- Organization of work in an unsafe manner
- Lack of safety training – only 25% received
- Failure to conduct on-site inspections – only 19%
- Failure to maintain or provide effective tools & PPE

Abusive Supervision & Retaliation

“I was afraid to say anything because sometimes if you say something, they fire you. “

*“When I told the foreman how I was feeling, he said “it’s nothing,” and got on my case and told me to hurry up and quit f***ing around.”*

“Because in reality, the day that you’re of no use to the company, they just get rid of you, and that’s it.”

Collective Action

“Because other coworkers started doing the same, and we said we were going to stop working.”

- – Forest worker explaining why the foreman gave him the chainsaw in better working condition he had asked for.

“One time we were thinning really close together. There were 7 of us, and I was afraid that a tree would get thrown on top of me. I was afraid to say anything because sometimes if you say something, they fire you. But, I felt like I was in danger, so I resigned myself to being fired, and talked to my coworkers. We decided to work further apart from one another. The foreman just ignored us. He didn’t care what we were doing. He doesn’t care about us.”

Outcomes in Medical Treatment & Recovery/RTW

- System Functional: worker received medical treatment and workers' compensation benefits (7 workers; of 23 case studies)
- System Failures: workers faced challenges in receiving medical care and/or workers' compensation benefits (16 workers)
 - not being taken by one's employer to a healthcare professional for treatment of the injury
 - being told to lie at the healthcare facility about work-relatedness of the injury
 - not filling out form 801 and not receiving workers' compensation benefits
 - not being allowed to follow the physician's orders with regard to light duty or recovery time away from work
 - being fired or not rehired after being injured

Underlying Causes: Factors Affecting Injury Outcomes

- **Safety Climate** – workers whose employers had indicators of safety climate were more likely to have recovered from their injuries and to have received workers' compensation benefits
- **Interpretation at Medical Exam** – workers for whom an interpreter that was unaffiliated with their employer were more likely to have better injury outcomes



System Failure: Work Organization and Injury Outcomes among Latino Forest Workers

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Forestry services is a hazardous industry with high job-related injury, illness, and fatality rates. The Northwest workforce is largely Spanish-speaking, Latino, and immigrant, working in poor conditions with insufficient attention paid to safety and health. Institutional racism fundamentally shapes the structural vulnerability of Latino immigrant workers. Given this context, we sought to understand how workplace organizational factors and safety climate affect job-related injuries in this industry.

Methods: We developed 23 case studies from personal interviews after selecting from an initial participant survey pool of 99 Latino forest workers in southern Oregon who had been injured at work in the previous 2 years. Workers were recruited through snowball sampling and door-to-door canvassing. Questions spanned work conditions, tasks, employer safety practices, injury experience, medical treatment, and workers' compensation benefits.

Results: Workers reported broken bones, chainsaw lacerations, back pain, heat and pesticide illnesses, and other occupational injuries. One-third of the cases fell into a *Systems Functional*

KEYWORDS

Work organization; occupational safety and health; safety climate; institutional racism; forest workers; Latino immigrants



Training and Materials

Safety Talks

Safety Talks based on *real worker stories* for use by supervisors (English & Spanish)

- Struck by tree
- Chainsaw kickback
- Herbicide application
- Speaking-up for safety





We started working around 6 am.



I couldn't see very well. I slipped and let go of the saw. It cut my toe badly.



They wrapped up my foot. I had to wait many hours before they took me home.

Here are some antibiotics to prevent infection. We could have stitched this but too much time has gone by.



My wife took me to the clinic.

Let's wait until it's a little lighter. Remember, walk sideways on steep slopes. Make sure you are stable before you start to cut.



I feel that we should have waited, so we could see better.

Sweetheart, I am worried about you getting hurt again. Please be careful.



It was several days before I could go back to my job.

How could this injury have been prevented?

Be Prepared

- Wear good work boots (caulks). Workers should not be allowed to wear improper footwear.
- Supervisor should assess the site before starting work, wait if it's too dark to work.
- Hold a pre-work safety meeting with the crew about the site.
- Warm-up and stretch before doing strenuous work.
- First Aid at site requires a stretcher or litter.

Pay Attention

- Don't work off balance. Find a stable position so you can control the saw.
- Engage the chainbrake while changing position, walking or climbing over obstacles
- Turn sideways to walk up or down steep slopes.
- Make sure you have 3 points of contact when stepping over things.
- Don't hurry. Don't compete with your co-workers.

Take Care of Yourself and Each Other

- Take rest breaks. We make more mistakes when we are tired.
- Saw cuts need to be treated by a doctor immediately, not just with first aid.
- Watch out for each other. Communicate about hazards you see.

Personal Narrative Educational Videos & Trainings

- **Video historias reales/
Reality Tales Videos**

<http://deohs.washington.edu/pnash/forestry-services-videos>

- **Promotores training cards**
- **Over 200 workers trained**



RESOURCES

- **PNASH** - http://deohs.washington.edu/pnash/forest_safety
- **NW Forest Worker Center** - <https://nwforestworkers.org>
- **Your state's OSHA / dept. of labor**



Questions/Discussion

DISCUSSION

- **Safety Climate & Training.** How can we best reach and train supervisors for this industry sector?
- **Contracts.** What opportunities are there to improve government contracts to support safety (monitoring contractor performance, slower pace of work and training)?
- **Policies/Regulations.** How might safety be improved through new policies and/or regulations?