IMMIGRANT WORKERS AND CHILDREN’S EXPOSURE TO TAKE-HOME LEAD

Richard Rabin
Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSH)
• Non profit membership coalition organizing and advocating for safe, healthy working conditions since 1976

• www.masscosh.org

• Immigrant Worker Center formed in 2006 to use OSH strategies in organizing most vulnerable workers
THE HOME REPAIR/PAINTING INDUSTRY AND ITS LABOR FORCE

• Small size of employers
  • Lack of knowledge of, and ability & desire to comply with, regulations
    ▪ Many immigrants
      - language barrier
      - lack of knowledge of rights
      - fear of retaliation
      - threat of deportation
PAINTERS’ BLOOD LEADS
MASSACHUSETTS OCCUPATIONAL LEAD REGISTRY

- Painters  306 (37%)
- Others    524 (63%)
- Total     830 (100%)

- House painters, 2013: 37% of BLL => 15 µg/dl
BLL SCREENING OF BRAZILIAN PAINTERS (N=61)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BLL (µg/dl)</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 10</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 – 24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 – 39</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;= 40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tbody>
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Adapted from: COBWEB, “A Report on Brazilian Immigrant Workers in Massachusetts,” 2009
HAZARDS OTHER THAN LEAD

Electrical
  Power lines
  Tools, cords
Falls
  Ladders
  Scaffolds
Falling objects
  Demolition
  Siding, roofing
HAZARDS OTHER THAN LEAD

- Heat

- Temp labor
  No training
  No awareness/compliance with RRP
  Wage theft
Seriously???

This is the kind of thing we see at OSHA from time to time.
This is the kind of thing we see on LEAD-BASED Paint inspections from time-to-time.
Case Study #1

LEAD-POISONED IMMIGRANT HOUSE PAINTERS

- 2 brothers, house painters from Central America
- 1 brother complaining of stomach pain, other ailments
- After several days of complaining to contractor, contractor drove worker to hospital ER
  - Told worker not to reveal work-relatedness
  - Threatened worker with contacting INS
  - Fired worker
Case Study (cont’d)

LEAD-POISONED IMMIGRANT HOUSE PAINTERS

- Blood lead: > 90 µg/dl

- Contacted OSHA, with help of Lead Registry
  Contractor fined
  Contractor paid worker for lost work time

- 2nd brother continued working, with symptoms; didn’t complain
Case #2 – Home renovation

• No RRP license
• Sanding floors, replacing siding, installing insulation
• No personal protective clothing/equipment
• Not paid wages ($1400)
CASE STUDIES

Case #3 – Electrical work and plumbing

• No RRP license
• No electrician license
• No health and safety training
• Not paid wages ($240)
TAKE-HOME CASE STUDY #1

- 6-year-old child
- Blood lead – 31 µg/dl (v)
- Home: modern, single-family, suburbs
- Father: contractor
“TAKE-HOME” CASE STUDY #2
(MMWR August 21, 2009)

- 6 children, ages 4 – 28 months
- Blood leads 15 – 32 µg/dl (median: 21 µg/dl)
- Homes – no lead paint
- Parents’ occupations – painting, paint removal, metal recycling
- Car seats (5 cars): 49 – 2100 µg/ft² (median: 550 µg/ft²)
- Safety seats (6): 43 – 420 µg/ft² (median: 98 µg/ft²)
Children of construction workers < 6 yrs. old (31): **BLL 7.4 µg/dl** (mean)

Children (controls) < 6 yrs. Old (19): **BLL 5.1 µg/dl** (mean)

Dust lead higher in construction worker homes and cars