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Workers Face Numerous Toxic Hazards on the Job; A New Advocacy Guide Aims to Change That

Every day, an average of 137 workers in the United States lose their lives to diseases and illnesses caused by on-the-job exposures to hazards like silica dust, asbestos, and a wide variety of toxic chemicals. That means every year, roughly 50,000 people die from occupational illnesses, and the toll is likely much higher because of underreporting and incomplete statistics. [A new advocacy guide](#) from the Center for Progressive Reform (CPR) aims to change that by assisting workers who are seeking to take action to eliminate or reduce their exposure to hazardous substances.

"Inadequately regulated chemical hazards are at their deadliest in the workplace," said Katie Tracy, CPR Policy Analyst and co-author of the guide. "People exposed to toxics at work tend to encounter dangerous substances more frequently, for longer durations, and at higher levels than the public at large. Too often their employers fail in their obligation to protect them, so we've put this guide together to share resources and strategies workers can use to secure a safe workplace."

According to [Chemical Detox for the Workplace: A Guide to Securing a Nontoxic Work Environment](#), workers are at substantial risk across dozens of sectors including agriculture, domestic cleaning, hair and nail salons, home repairs, building construction, and chemical manufacturing. These risks persist despite workplace safety and environmental laws on the books in the United States.

"Agencies like OSHA and EPA encounter serious obstacles when developing workplace protections against toxic substances, even when they have overwhelming scientific evidence of significant health risks," said Thomas McGarity, CPR Board Member and guide co-author. "The difficulty results not from a lack of data, but from intense lobbying from well-funded industries."

Rena Steinzor, CPR Member Scholar and a guide co-author, added, "Budgetary constraints and lack of political will also stall updates to existing health standards and the creation of new ones. As a result, when OSHA moves to address hazardous chemicals in the workplace, it can take a decade for the agency to clear a new rule through the regulatory system. Once health standards are adopted, OSHA and the state occupational safety and health agencies often fail to enforce standards vigorously, all but inviting unscrupulous employers to ignore the law and endanger their workers."

CPR produced the advocacy guide to help workers, their representatives, and advocates move faster than OSHA or EPA can in securing a safer and healthier work environment. It is intended to assist workers and advocates with finding information on chemical hazards and utilizing that information to achieve a nontoxic workplace.

- **Section One** of the guide provides a list of tactics worker advocates can employ to reduce toxic risks and assist injured workers, such as working with an employer to utilize safer alternatives, filing a complaint with OSHA or submitting a tip to EPA, suing low-road employers, and advocating beyond the workplace.
- **Section Two** gives readers a basic overview of the federal laws applicable to toxic chemicals.
- **Section Three** specifies the best resources available to help identify chemical information and take action to reduce hazards in the workplace.

"Although the guide does not cover every issue or situation workers may face, it is our hope that it will assist with identifying the appropriate questions to ask, initiating research on chemicals of concern in the workplace, and collaborating with other workers, unions, and local organizers to take action," said Sidney Shapiro, CPR Board Member and co-author of the guide.

Chemical Detox for the Workplace: A Guide to Securing a Nontoxic Work Environment is available online at <http://bit.ly/ChemDetoxWorkplace>. CPR will also be hosting a webinar related to the guide on Wednesday, May 8 at 1 p.m. Eastern. Visit the webinar registration page at <https://cc.readytalk.com/r/xv59t044lage&eom> for more information.

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