Building a Cancer Prevention Campaign

There are lots of quick and easy ways to investigate health problems at work, here are some ideas. For further information go to BWI safety representatives training book in downloads.

Risk mapping: Draw a basic map of the workplace, marking on the machines, workstations and the substances or processes used. Record on the risk map any health problems reported by workers doing particular jobs. Repeat the exercise periodically and see if any problems become apparent. If cancer causing substances or processes are being used, investigate alternatives and, if this is not possible, safer work methods.

Body mapping: Draw two body outlines on a large piece of paper, one representing the front of a person, one the back. Get workers to write on where they feel pain or have had health problems or symptoms. If workers doing similar jobs identify similar problems, then you can start linking workplace factors to their health concerns.

Investigate: Review existing sources, like workplace sick leave, accident, compensation and pension records. Don't forget retired members – many cancers take decades to emerge, so may only occur after a worker has finished working. Newspaper reports may highlight local deaths linked to occupational disease. Where there is a suspicion of a problem, dig deeper.

Surveys: Do-it-yourself research can quickly identify problems. This need not be a highly scientific and time-consuming business. A union rep could ask workers on their lunch break if they have concerns about a particular job or substance, or if they had noticed any worrying sick leave trends or causes of ill-health in their workmates.

Get your priorities right: If you find out a cancer-causing substance or process is in use, negotiate safer substances, processes or work methods immediately. The best way to ensure you don't find any cancers in your workplace is to ensure there are no jobs where workers are at risk.

Resources

☐ Hazards website

Union do-it-yourself research webpages
Union research tools webpages

Barefoot researching

The manual Barefoot Research: A Worker's Manual for Organising On Work Security has been developed to help empower workers to increase their level of control over their own work situations, to protect their health and well being, and to improve their level of basic security. To download, see downloads.