

# Worker Surveys

It is often useful to ask workers about job-related injuries and illnesses they have experienced, what training and protective equipment they have received, and what health and safety concerns they have. Surveys of workers can be done by distributing a written questionnaire, interviewing them in person, or meeting in groups.

## Written Questionnaires

- Talk informally with people in the department to get their general ideas before you create the survey. Know what information you're looking for.
- Keep the survey short.
- Make the survey attractive and simple to fill out.
- Use everyday language and avoid technical terms. Remember that workers' reading levels may vary.
- Consider translating the questionnaire into other languages if necessary or offer to help workers who have difficulty reading English as they fill out the questionnaire.
- Include an open-ended section for workers to discuss any issues or concerns they may have.
- Include a brief introduction and explain why this survey is important.
- Ask questions that are appropriate for the particular job titles and job tasks you are targeting (if any). For example:
  - Ask about specific symptoms a worker may be experiencing, like muscle strain, backache, or headache.
  - Ask about sources of workplace stress like long hours, poor supervision, understaffing, and conflicting priorities.
  - Ask about poor workplace design that may cause musculoskeletal disorders such as repetitive strain injury or carpal tunnel syndrome.
  - Ask about reactions to or concerns about chemical or biological hazards.



## Written Questionnaires (CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE)

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- Ask about past accidents or incidents, and whether the causes were satisfactorily corrected.
- Explain what will be done with the results.

On the next page is a sample worker health survey. It is just an example and is not comprehensive. The WOSH Specialist Resource Centers can help you find other surveys you can adapt to fit your needs.

## Interviews

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- Speak to at least three or four workers in every work area and on every shift. Ask about their specific tasks, especially any that could be hazardous, even if done only occasionally. Ask what personal protective equipment they use, what training they have received, what injuries or illnesses they have had, what health symptoms they have noticed, and what concerns or worries they have about their health and their work.
- Speak to supervisors to find out what they know about the hazards, what precautions they take to control them, what personal protective equipment is available, what training the workers have received, and what procedures are followed when new hazards are recognized. Also ask about any injuries or illnesses that have occurred.
- Speak to maintenance department workers and plant engineers who know the process and equipment well. Try to find out what problems have occurred.
- Speak with medical staff who know what types of injuries and illnesses the workers have reported.
- Speak with the health and safety committee (if one exists) or company safety staff about the hazards in the work area and the protective measures that are used.

To get the best information from the people being interviewed, it is best to talk to them privately. Hold the conversation away from other people, and offer to keep the person's name confidential if necessary.

## Meet in Groups

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- Hold a discussion group to talk about common health problems or concerns.
- Use a “body map”— a large outline of the human body where group members can mark where they are having symptoms.

# Sample Worker Health Survey

Return this survey to:

Name:

Phone:

Date: / /

Male

Female

Right handed

Left handed

Employer/department:

Job title:

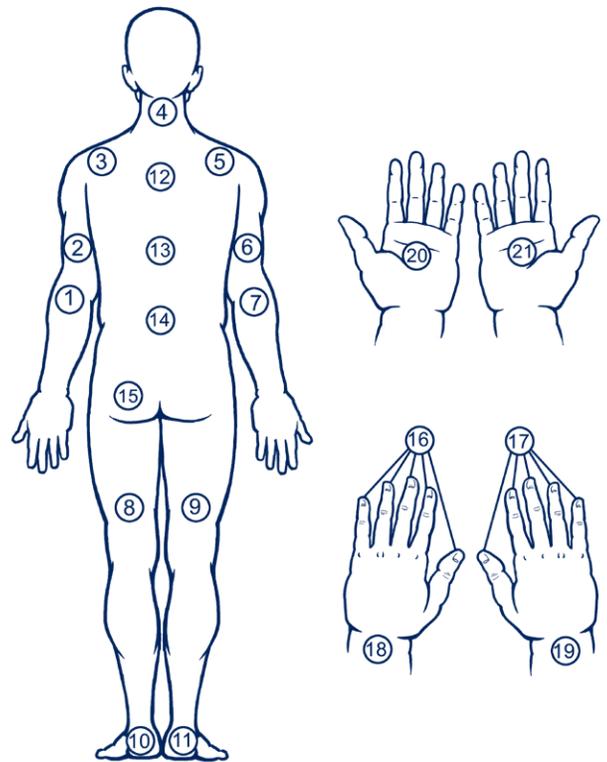
Main job activities:

1. Have you had any pain or discomfort during the past year which you feel might have been caused or made worse by your work?

**Yes**     **No**

If Yes, please shade the circle in the part of the body affected.  
If No, please stop here.

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| 1. Left elbow          | 12. Upper back                                   |
| 2. Left upper arm      | 13. Middle of back                               |
| 3. Left shoulder       | 14. Lower back                                   |
| 4. Neck                | 15. Buttocks                                     |
| 5. Right shoulder      | 16. Fingers on left hand                         |
| 6. Right upper arm     | 17. Fingers on right hand                        |
| 7. Right elbow         | 18. Left wrist                                   |
| 8. Back of left thigh  | 19. Right wrist                                  |
| 9. Back of right thigh | 20. Left palm                                    |
| 10. Left foot          | 21. Right palm                                   |
| 11. Right foot         | 22. Other (please shade area and describe) _____ |



2. What part of your job do you think causes your pain or discomfort?

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3. What time does your discomfort usually occur? (Check all that apply.)

Morning     Afternoon     Evening     Night

4. Do any of these symptoms wake you up at night?  Yes     No

If YES, what are the symptoms?

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5. Does the pain or discomfort interfere with routine activities (such as eating, driving, walking, cooking, etc.)?  Yes     No

6. Did this problem begin before or after you started your current job?  Before     After

7. Have you visited your doctor about this pain or discomfort?  Yes     No

If YES, please describe the diagnosis or treatment:

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8. Have you had to take time off work in the last year because of this pain or discomfort?  Yes     No

How much?

When?

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9. Do any co-workers experience similar pain or discomfort?  Yes     No

How many?

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10. Did you report this injury to your supervisor or anyone else in management?  Yes     No

If yes, what happened?

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If no, why not?

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*Adapted from "Workplace Ergo Action Kit" AFL-CIO, Department of Occupational Safety and Health*