

WORKSAFE

safety, health, and justice for workers
seguridad, salud y justicia para los trabajadores

March 2020

With COVID-19, Worker Health is Public Health

The crisis of COVID-19 has already raised so many questions about health and safety protections at work: protection from the virus itself, protection from workplace abuses related to the virus, protection from the deep inequities of our economic system, protection from the racism that too often surges during public health crises.

COVID-19 has thrust worker safety and health into the spotlight — where it should have been all along and where it must stay if we are to flatten the curve and weather this storm. Worker health and public health have always been [one in the same](#), and this fact has never been clearer.

At Worksafe, we are joining with allies to support workers during this unbelievably difficult time. Last week, we [sent an urgent letter](#) to the Governor urging immediate steps to ensure that healthcare employers fully implement California's [Aerosol Transmissible Diseases Standard](#). We have added a [new page](#) to our website where we'll be collecting information and advocacy alerts related to coronavirus. And we hope you'll join Worksafe and [National COSH](#) this week for **Webinars on Coronavirus: What Workers and Advocates Need to Know** (English on [Thursday](#) and Spanish, with our own Nicole Marquez-Baker, on [Friday](#)).

Like other organizations across the globe, we are adjusting our work practices to cope with this new reality. Our offices are closed, and we are working from home. We are checking in daily by video feed, and we even managed to have a [fully-virtual board meeting](#). We are getting to know each other's house pets

(who really seem to enjoy the attention of the camera). We are supporting each other in these strange and stressful times, and we are acknowledging the weight of collective grief.

As many have expressed, **now is the time for physical distancing coupled with fierce social solidarity**. We invite you to stay connected with our work — follow us on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#), and never hesitate to [reach out directly](#). We will get through this together, and we will emerge stronger and more united on the other side.

In Solidarity,

Augustin, Joan, Jora, Karin, Maggie, Mara, Nicole, Stephen, and Thais

Race Equity & the "Future of Work"

Earlier this month, Worksafe submitted a detailed comment letter to the [Future of Work Commission](#) with our recommendations regarding the impact of emerging technologies on diverse communities and the occupational health and safety of workers.



The Commission, part of the state's Labor & Workforce Development Agency, is tasked with developing "a new social compact for California workers, based on an expansive vision for economic equity that takes work and jobs as the starting point." Our letter, [which you can read here](#), urged that the Commission's work be "centered on race since structural racism sits at the foundation and intersection of all the issues affecting vulnerable workers."

The Commission's mission is to understand, analyze, and make recommendations around the current state of jobs and work and articulate a "vision for work and jobs in the future." Worksafe urges that any such vision be placed in the appropriate larger context:

The "Future of Work" and the "social compact" that the Commission seeks to create will not only affect the workplace and working conditions, but the overall health of workers, their families, and their communities....

Worker experiences and expertise [are] critical to understanding how to

structure informed solutions that lead to effective measures to prevent worker injury, illness, and death. Moreover, it is critical that government agencies are adequately resourced to enforce California's laws, standards, and regulations.

Worksafe Managing Attorney Jora Trang took the lead in authoring the powerful comment letter, which we are proud to have submitted jointly with numerous close allies. The letter urges that **"health equity, race equity, and occupational health and safety are critical, foundational issues that must be considered" as we envision the Future of Work.**

Worksafe's mission is to bring justice and power to the California workplace in order to prevent injury, illness, and death on the job. Central to that mission is our strong belief that any social compact regarding the Future of Work must be considered in light of day-to-day realities facing vulnerable workers whose lives and limbs are at risk every day.

Cal/OSHA Extends Temporary Wildfire Smoke Rules

Last week, the Cal/OSHA Standards Board voted unanimously to extend the [Wildfire Smoke Emergency Standard](#) for another 90 days. This innovative, temporary regulation has been an important tool for California workers — it clarifies employer obligations and provides basic protections for workers who are exposed to the dangerous particulate matter in wildfire smoke.



Photo by the Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE)

With fire season fast approaching, we are urging Cal/OSHA to adopt a strong and effective permanent wildfire smoke standard. We've been organizing with labor unions, worker centers, environmental justice organizations, and legal aid providers to gather information about what is needed. As we work toward a permanent rule, Worksafe is committed to keeping the voices of impacted workers front and center. We are also working to make sure that domestic workers and day laborers are protected. Check out these two pieces from KALW Crosscurrents to learn more:

→ [As California's Wildfires Get Worse, Domestic Workers Fight For Protection](#)

Recent Outreach & Education

Before COVID-related restrictions began, [Worksafe attorneys](#) were busy traveling around the state educating workers and advocates about a variety of health and safety topics. Here's a quick roundup:



Street Level Health Project Training

Nicole leads a safety training with day laborers at Street Level Health Project in Oakland

On March 10, Worksafe facilitated a health and safety awareness training with [Street Level Health Project](#) and the Oakland Workers' Collective. Nicole and Karín conducted the training in Spanish using a popular education approach. Participants drew body maps of their injuries, hazard maps of their worksites, discussed their shared experiences, and brainstormed remedies. At the time of the training, COVID-19 had not yet been declared a pandemic, but it was a concern for many day laborers in attendance. We opened the training by reviewing basic infectious disease protections and creating space to discuss the racist and xenophobic undercurrents of the emerging health crisis.

American Bar Association Disaster Relief Symposium

On February 21, Nicole traveled to Pepperdine School of Law in Malibu to serve as a panelist for a workshop titled "Strategies for Outreach and Advocacy for Vulnerable Communities." Her presentation focused on strategies to advocate for the health and safety rights of the vulnerable workers during and after a disaster, specifically workers of color, day laborers, and domestic workers.

Communications Workers' Leadership Conference

On February 19, Augustin and Nicole traveled to Anaheim to facilitate a workshop about the wildfire smoke standard for the [Communications Workers of America](#) (CWA) annual meeting and leadership conference. The purpose of the training was to learn about the hazards these workers face during wildfires, share information about the new standard, offer support to CWA on issues related to workplace health and wildfires.

Worksafe's Board Welcomes New Members



Laura Boatman



Cheryl Wallach



Carisa Harris-Adamson

Worksafe is governed by a 13-member [board of directors](#) whose active involvement informs and inspires our workplace health and safety advocacy. We are excited to share that we recently welcomed three new members to the team:

Laura Boatman brings decades of experience with worker outreach and education; she is currently a Program Coordinator with the State Building & Construction Trades Council of California. **Cheryl Wallach** is a Partner at Ford & Wallach, one of California's preeminent workers' compensation law firms. **Dr. Carisa Harris-Adamson** is a professor and researcher who wears many hats in the occupational safety world; she currently directs the UC Ergonomics Research & Graduate Training Program.

We also recently said goodbye to **Linda Delp** who has served on the Worksafe Board since 2007. "Worksafe has a critical role advocating for state policies to protect workers' health, and I'm honored to have served on the board," she says. Please join us in thanking Linda for her many years of leadership and support!

➔ Are you interested in serving on the Worksafe Board, or do you know someone who would be a good fit? We are always interested in recruiting more board members, so [send us your tips!](#)

Congrats, Mandy Hawes!

We're proud to share that **Amanda Hawes**, one of our founders, was recently honored with a lifetime achievement award at a Women of the Year

celebration hosted by Senator Jim Beall. The event was intended to “celebrate the accomplishments of the women who have helped shape Silicon Valley,” and Mandy was selected for her [tireless advocacy](#) on behalf of electronics workers and their families.

Mandy co-founded Worksafe’s predecessor organization, Santa Clara Center for Occupational Safety and Health, in 1977 and served on our board of directors for many years. Under her thoughtful guidance, Worksafe grew and evolved into the organization we are today. Thank you, Mandy — you continue to inspire us and so many others.

COVID-19 Mutual Aid Resources

The impact of COVID-19 is unprecedented, and many workers need assistance. At Worksafe, we are doing all we can to protect the health and safety of all workers. And your well-being is important to us. That is why we are providing some resources below to help you in case you have lost your job or your livelihood has been impacted:

The LA Black Worker Center has a mutual aid campaign to assist those in need. Fill out [this webform](#) if you live in the Los Angeles area and are in need of supplies or assistance. [Here](#) is a list of other community resources in the Los Angeles region.

Restaurant Opportunities Centers United is providing [resources and financial assistance](#) to restaurant workers impacted by the coronavirus crisis. They also have a [list of resources](#) available for Bay Area residents, focusing on restaurant and tipped workers.

Click [here](#) to donate to the LA Black Worker Center Rapid Response fund and [here](#) to donate to ROC United disaster relief fund. Thank you for supporting California’s vulnerable workers!

Worksafe the only legal services organization in California focused on worker health and safety. Please consider supporting our work with a donation.

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