

## CHAPTER 4

## Organizing for Change

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## 4

ORGANIZING FOR  
CHANGE

When workers act together than can solve many workplace problems. Different groups of workers share similar problems, but each group will find the solutions that fit their situation. The activities in Chapter 3 can be used to identify problems and to begin organizing as a group. This chapter describes steps you can take to decide which problems are the most important and what actions to take.



**Take action!**

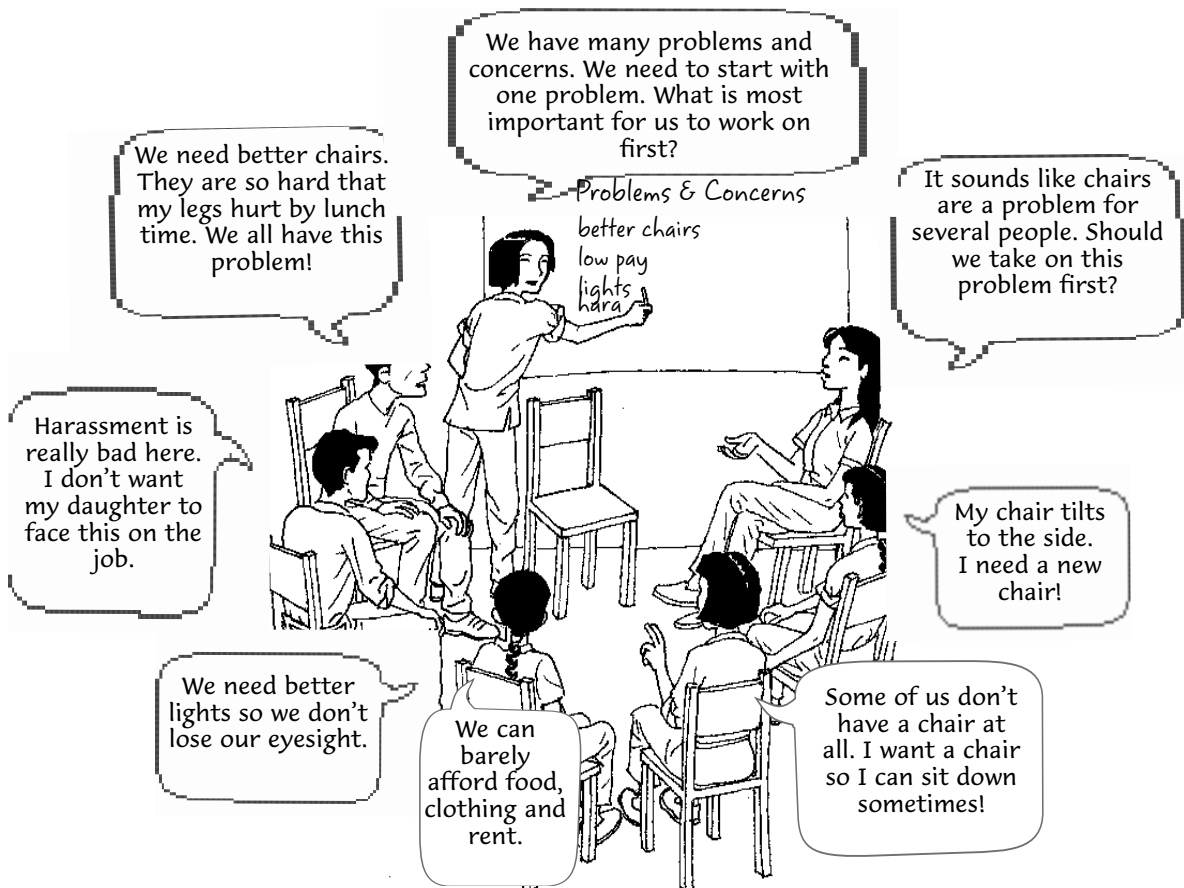
## Step 1: Choose a problem that most workers feel is important

Although many changes are probably needed, your group may be more effective if it works on one at a time. First, pick a problem the group has a good chance of solving quickly. As the group learns to work together you can work on more difficult problems.

Once you have gathered a group of workers together, this group needs to decide what problems to tackle first. It may be helpful if the group discusses questions such as:

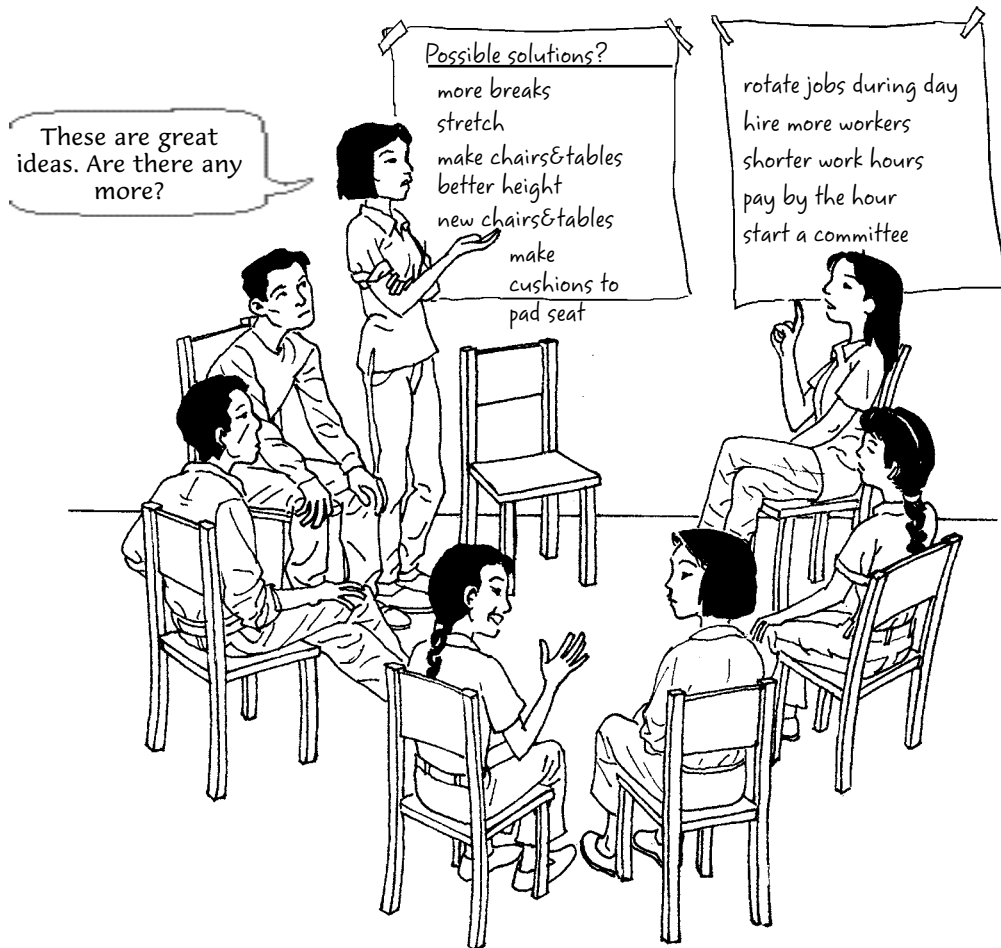
- Which dangers affect the most workers?
- Which danger causes the most serious harm?
- Which dangers have solutions that can be done quickly?
- Which dangers have solutions the boss should easily agree to do?
- Which dangers affect the community the most?
- What will get strong support from co-workers?
- Which community groups, politicians, or community leaders can give support?
- Which local media — radio, newspapers, or TV stations — are likely to give support?
- Is the company violating any laws?
- Are there international groups that can help?

You may need more information before deciding on a problem or going on to Step 2. See the section "Gather more information and find your allies" beginning on page 44 for sources of information.



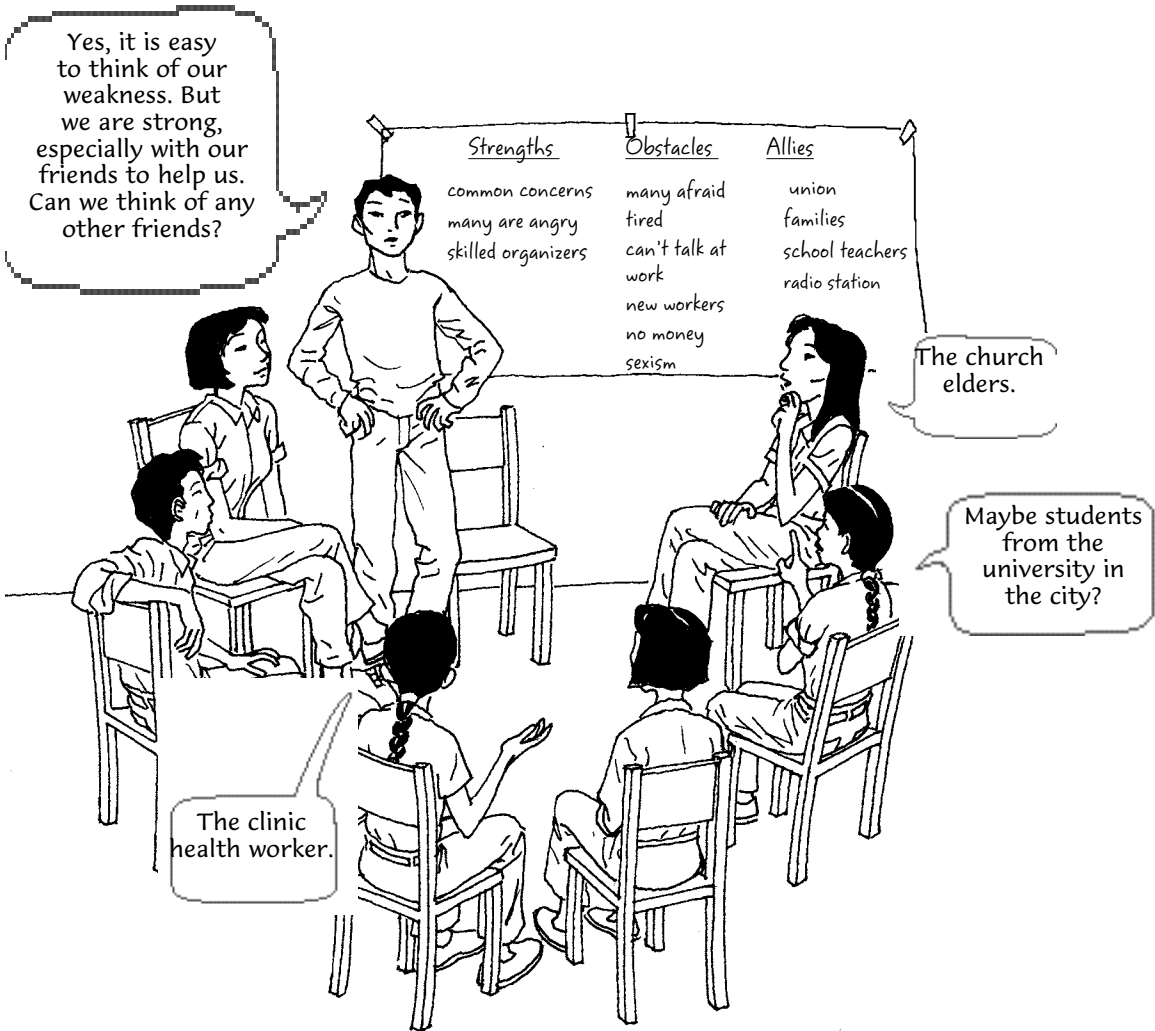
## Step 2: Decide how to solve the problem

List all the ways the problem could be solved. Pick the ways that best use your group's strengths and resources. Consider starting with short-term solutions while you also work towards more permanent, long-term solutions.



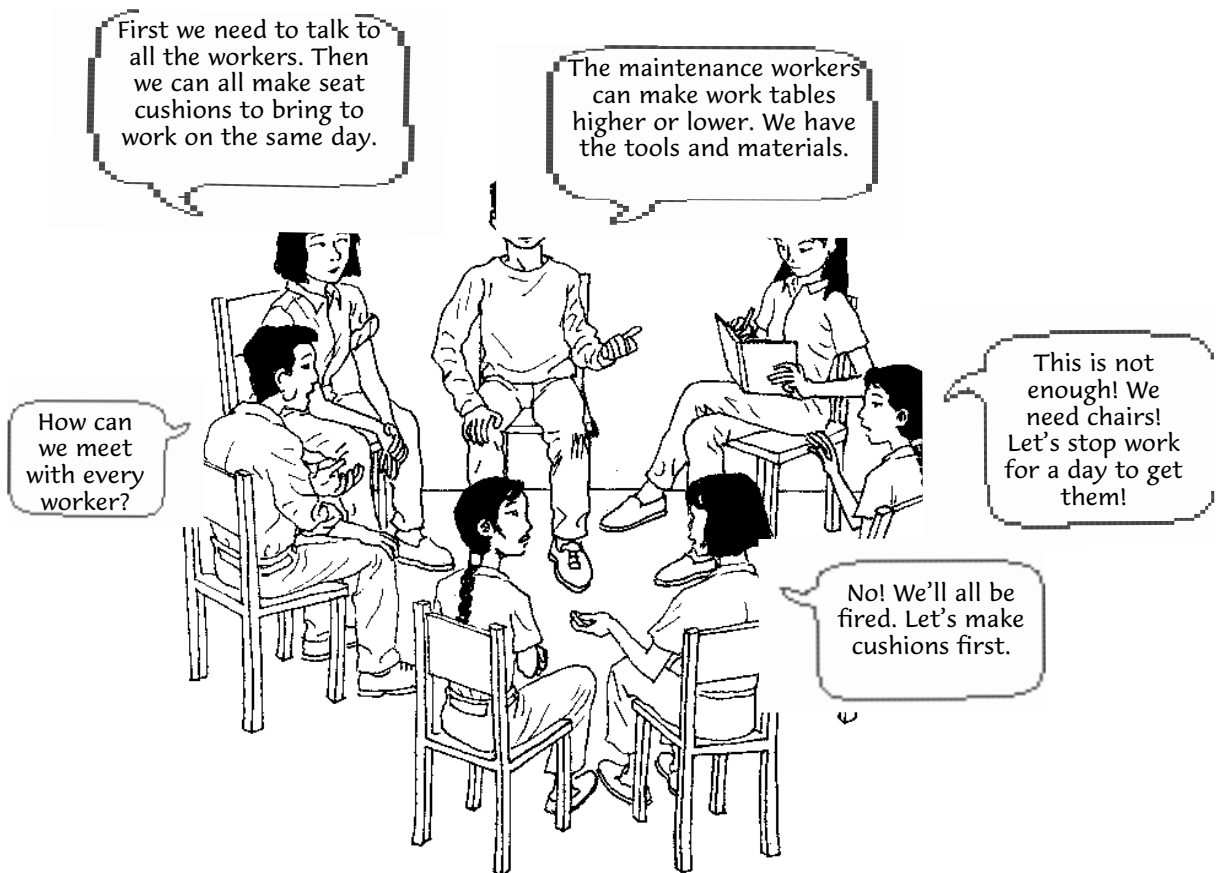
### Step 3: Look at your strengths, obstacles, and allies

In addition to the strength of working together, what other strengths do workers have that they can use to solve these problems? What are the obstacles the group will have to overcome? What strategies would be most useful to pressure the employer to make changes? What allies would be helpful to pressure the employer? What allies does the employer have to resist workers' demands?



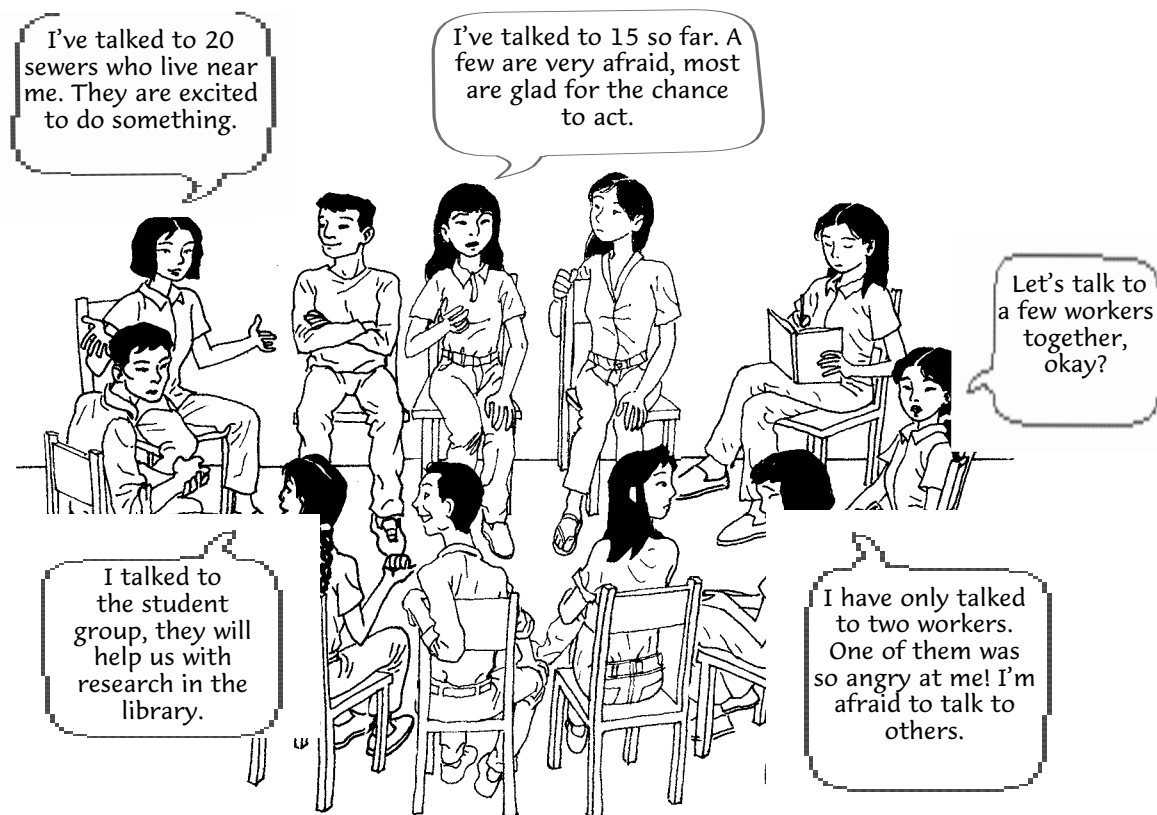
## Step 4: Plan for action

Organizing workers to take action takes a lot of time, especially if workers fear being attacked or losing their jobs. Your group needs to make a plan and decide who will carry out each part of the plan. Talk about how to do each task. Share ideas and skills for successful organizing. Your first task might be to recruit more people to this organizing committee. Set a date when each task in the plan should be finished, then set a time to meet again to see how things are going.



## Step 5: Check in: How is the plan is going?

Have each person report on progress they are making with their tasks. Celebrate what you have accomplished, such as how many workers support the demands or are willing to take action. Then decide if you are seeing the results you expected overall and if you need to change the plan.



## Step 6: Adjust the plan if you need to

If the plan is not going well, decide why. What needs to be changed to make the plan work? Adjust the plan and decide which tasks each member of the group will do. As before, set dates when each task should be finished and when you will meet again to evaluate and adjust the plan.

If people need help to complete their tasks, talk over what is needed and who can help. A worker joining the group can take responsibility for tasks she has never done if she gets advice, training, and support from more experienced organizers.

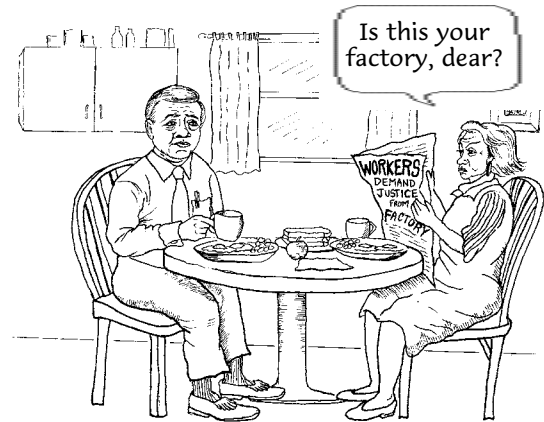
Organizing and working for change is hard and can take a long time. Try not to get discouraged if big changes do not come as soon as you hoped they would. Remember to celebrate the smaller victories along the way. Keep sharing your stories, ideas, and skills with each other. By working together, you are stronger! By working together, you can make change! (And when you win one, you can move on to the next problem!)

## Could an international campaign help?

Local and international organizations may be able to help workers in a local factory. They can bring information and experience that may be useful. For example, they can help get information about the company that buys garments produced in a specific factory. They can find out about the labor conditions in other factories used by that company. Knowing who owns or contracts to a specific factory can be useful for organizing an international campaign to put pressure on a company to treat the factory workers better.

International campaigns can get the word of local worker efforts out to the world. The large companies that buy the products made in EPZ factories do not like the public to see them as “sweatshop” companies. The personal story of an EPZ factory worker is the best way to win the support of people around the world.

An international campaign can only support the factory workers’ local campaign and goals if the workers tell the campaigners what support is needed (and if the international supporters listen). Communicating with the campaigners is easier if workers are organized into a strong group or union. Workers can also have a strong relationship with an outside union or community group that serves as a liaison between non-unionized workers and an international campaign.



When corporations are global,  
your campaign can be, too.



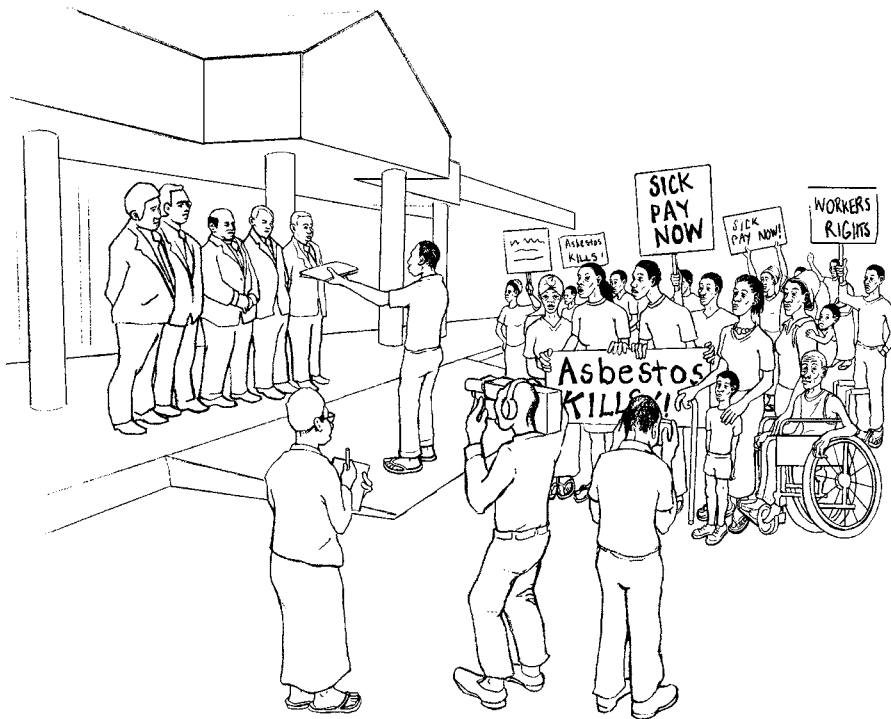
## Take action to win change

There are many kinds of actions workers can take to eliminate dangers and fix other problems at work. Sometimes it takes months or years to win changes using different actions or the same actions over and over again. Workers have been successful using the actions listed here.

**Educate and reach out** to other workers, the community, your employer, and government officials and agencies about workers' needs.

**Build relationships with allies** and leaders in the community who can help persuade the employer and join in other actions you organize.

**Organize many workers** to take action together to demand solutions from the boss. This is a very powerful way to get employers to pay attention. It can also be very risky for workers who participate. The more workers act together the more powerful their message and the less risk there is to each worker.



Workers have taken actions like these:

- Wear a ribbon or pin of the same color.
- Take a delegation to talk to the boss about specific demands.
- Refuse to do specific things (such as work overtime or eat at the factory cafeteria).
- Stop work for a few minutes, and hour, or longer.
- Hold a rally with co-workers and the community together.

**Hold a public hearing** where workers can testify to community leaders about problems

in the factory and worker demands for changes.

**Hold a public rally** in front of the factory, in front of the boss' house, at a government office that should be helping workers, or in town to rally support from the community.

**Hold a workshop** for workers and the community on the national laws on labor rights, workplace health and safety, the rights of women and children, etc. Hold a workshop for workers on a specific workplace problem, like harassment or the bad air.

**Gather more information** from workers, the community, or others to help you choose solutions and win changes. See 'Gathering more information' beginning on page 44 later in this chapter for more on how to do this. Also see Chapter 3, "Looking for Problems and Solutions.

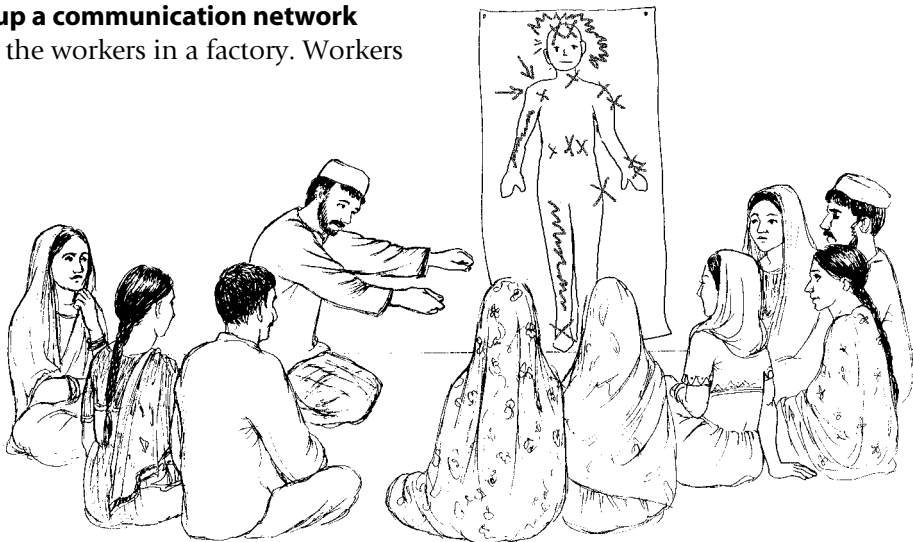
**Set up a communication network** among the workers in a factory. Workers

can pass information among themselves about what the boss is doing, what is happening to workers in different areas, and how the workers could respond as a group.

**Ask workers to help each other.** For example, one worker can help another who must lift heavy rolls of fabric. Or, one worker can give another tips on using tools or arranging her work area.

**Coordinate workers** to take small individual actions to make their work area better (for example, bring a pillow to sit on). Organize them to take the same individual action at the same time.

**File a complaint with government agencies** to enforce labor, workplace safety and anti-discrimination laws.



## Gather more information and find your allies

There are many ways to collect more information about work dangers and solutions. Sometimes a person you go to for information will also become an ally who will support your actions in other ways. This section shows some of the sources of information that workers in other factories have used.



**Your co-workers** are your best source of information about conditions at work. Talk to workers often to share ideas and new information.

**Unions** usually have clear information on the rights and health of workers in your country and industry. Unions have specific information about hazards in the industries the members work in, so contact a union of workers in the garment industry. Unions also have lots of experience solving workplace problems, organizing workers, negotiating contracts, and pressuring employers to make changes. Learning from their experience will give you many ideas for things to try or to avoid.

**Community groups** can be very helpful with information about laws, rights, strategies for



community education and organizing, and local political conditions. Women's groups, religious groups and political organizations are often active in campaigns for worker's rights and health. Some of these organizations have national and international connections that may be useful for collecting and sharing information for a campaign.

**Government agencies** can provide information about dangers in your industry, and the laws and regulations protecting workers' rights and health. They can tell you how to file a complaint about

working conditions that violate the law and how the law is enforced. Before you go to the government for information or help, consider whether the official or agency has the power and political support to help you.

**Health and safety professionals** can provide detailed technical information about dangers and solutions to fix them. They know where to buy equipment, tools, and supplies your employer may





need to fix the dangerous problem. They have the equipment to measure how much chemical vapor is in the air, noise levels, ventilation, and other things. They often know the laws and regulations on workplace safety and health. They have access to reference books, their colleagues, and computers to get more information.

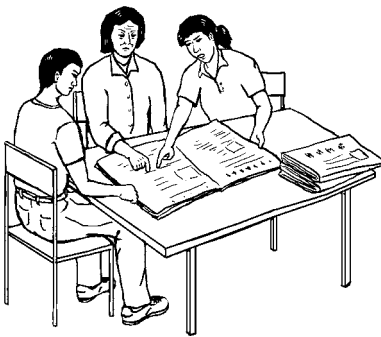
**Company records** may contain useful information on a variety of topics: how wages and work hours are documented and paid, injuries and illnesses workers are experiencing at work, how much money the company earns and spends, what chemicals they use, or if they have measured health hazards.

The law in some countries requires the employer to give this information to workers who ask for it. Even if there is no law, you may want to ask for these records.

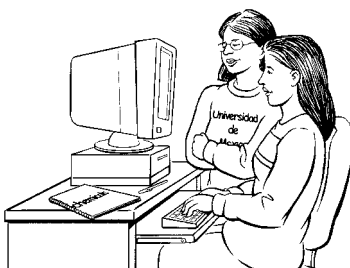
**History:** Some employers have a long history. The history may tell if the employer has mistreated workers or had a disaster such as a fire or chemical spill. You may find out if the factory manager or owner has helped the community or how they are connected to local government officials.

Look in old newspapers or government files. Talk to current

and former workers at the factory and community groups. You will need to judge who to ask and how to ask about this history. Keep in mind that two people may honestly remember the same events very differently.



**Library and the internet** can be good sources of information. The internet is an electronic library with millions of sites that you can “visit” using a computer. To find information on the internet, you need someone skilled at searching there. Universities often have specialized libraries of health, chemical, industrial, and business information. Both traditional libraries and the internet have information on your country’s laws on workers’ rights, workplace safety, women’s rights, and so on. You can also find detailed information on work hazards and the names of organizations that have more information.



## Measuring hazards

Some dangers can be easily measured. Measuring a hazard can help explain to others why the hazard is important, and can help you measure when that hazard has been reduced. Choose measures that work for the dangers in your factory. Workers have used many ways to measure hazards, including:

- Count how many pieces you manufacture in a shift.
- Count how many hand movements you make while making a piece.
- Count how many times you bend during a shift.
- Compare pay of men and women workers.
- Measure how much a bundle, part or box you lift weighs. Use a scale or compare it to the weight of other common objects (such as a bag of rice or a bucket of water).
- Measure how hot or cold the air is with a thermometer.
- Compare the loudness of a factory noise to other noises. (Can you hear a person next to you talk in a regular voice? Is the noise as loud as a diesel truck?)
- Count how many workers have a specific pain or other health problems from work (such as a sore shoulder, aching legs, red skin rash, ringing ears, dizziness, cuts, and so on).
- Count how many workers and fire exit doors are in your factory. Count



Moving many small bundles can be as dangerous as moving a few heavy ones.

- how many exit doors are locked during the work shift.
- Count how many workers and toilets there are in the factory.
- Measure how much of a chemical is used each shift.
- Count how many workers have been threatened by the supervisor and how.