



# Health and Safety Concerns Affecting Cannabis Grow Workers in PA

UFCW Local 1776



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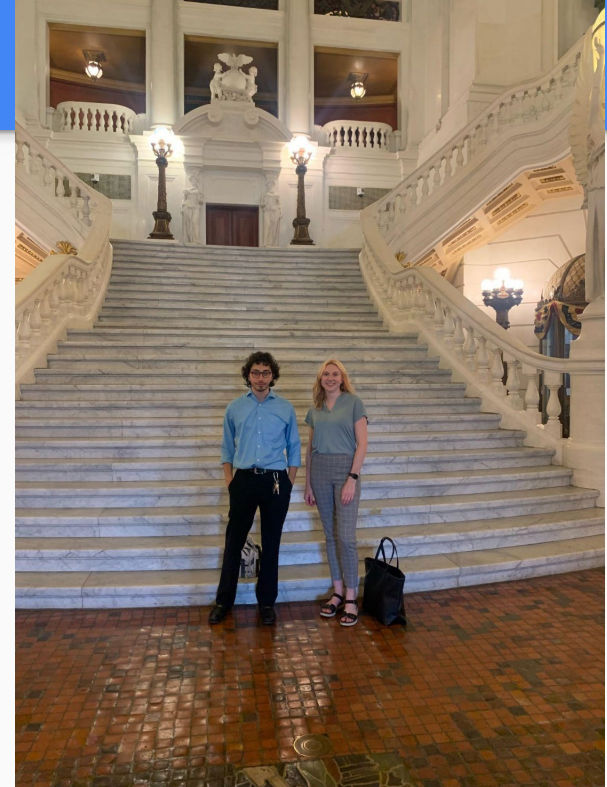
# Background

- Cannabis was first legalized for medical use in Pennsylvania in 2016
  - Private workers covered under OSHA
- United Food and Commercial Workers 1776 represents over 500 cannabis workers in the state
  - The Local includes 35,000 members throughout PA, OH, NY, and WV
    - Workers at: stadiums, food plants, grocery stores, liquor stores
  - Lobbies for pro-labor legislation in PA State Capitol



# Objectives

1. Identify and document health and safety hazards facing cannabis grow workers
2. Make recommendations for Union interventions
3. Gain a deeper understanding of UFCW Local 1776





# Methods

- Worksite visits
- Focus group
- Survey
  - Likert scale questions
  - Pain frequency questions
- Steward training

## Cannabis Worker Safety Questionnaire

We are interns currently working with UFCW 1776 to investigate the health and safety issues that Pennsylvania's cannabis workers face on the job. We will be using this data to create comprehensive measures to improve worker safety. Your responses are very important to our work, and will be kept private within the Union.

 semyers427@gmail.com (not shared) [Switch account](#) 

\* Required

What part of the cannabis industry is your role in? \*

☐ Cultivation

☐ Manufacturing and processing

☐ Packaging

☐ Dispensary

☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your job title? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been at your company? \*

☐ Under 6 months


☐ 6 months to 1 year

☐ 1-2 years

☐ 2-3 years

☐ 3-4 years

☐ 4+ years

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Comments on "My workplace is adequately staffed for all shifts."

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

My supervisors and coworkers treat me with respect. \*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

Comments on "My supervisors and coworkers treat me with respect."

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_


If I experienced an injury, I would feel comfortable reporting it to my supervisor. \*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

Comments on "If I experienced an injury, I would feel comfortable reporting it to my supervisor."

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

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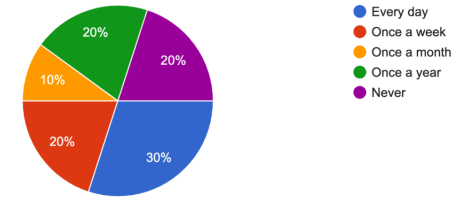
# Observations/Results

- From the 3 worksite tours:
  - Observed hazards relating to: fire safety, pesticide and chemical use, high ambient CO<sub>2</sub> levels, and poor ventilation
- From the Focus Group with four stewards:
  - Expressed major concerns with: lighting, CO<sub>2</sub>, chemicals, doctor's notes not being accepted, allergens, training, and PPE

# Survey Results

How frequently in the past 12 months have you experienced pain in your lower back?

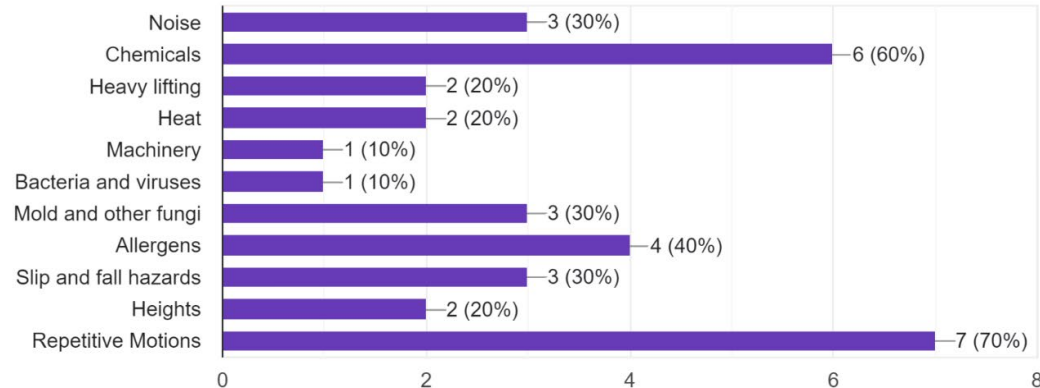
10 responses



- (n=10): Main concerns with training, staffing, ergonomic issues, and chemicals

What hazards do you encounter regularly? (Check all that apply)

10 responses





# Give Back Product

- Tri-fold handout for workers with common hazards and actions to take
- Draft of letter to company with biggest issues and potential solutions

## Chemical Safety

Understanding the properties of chemicals you may come into contact with can help keep you safe.

### Reading Labels:



Images from NFPA and UN



### Safety Data Sheets (SDS)

Your employer should provide access to an SDS for every chemical used in the facility in both digital and hard copies.

## Health Hazards

### Biomass

Both the cannabis plant itself and the materials used to cultivate it can be harmful to your health without the proper protection. For your safety, your employer should provide the following types of Personal Protective Equipment for tasks in cultivation and manufacturing or processing:

- A fit tested respirator that is designed to filter out particulate such as fungus or ground cannabis
- Disposable plastic long sleeves that protect your arms from coming into contact with the plants which can cause rashes or allergic reactions
- Disposable non-porous gloves to keep your hands safe from inflammatory compounds on the surface of the raw product

### CO2 Safety

The CO2 that might be used in various parts of the production process can be dangerous if present in the air in higher doses. If you find yourself experiencing these symptoms more than you usually do in rooms where CO2 is used, consider going out for some fresh air and informing your supervisor or steward:

- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Rapid breathing or heart rate
- Confusion

## Physical Safety

### Emergency Preparedness

- Does your facility have clearly lit and visible emergency exit signs?
- Are there fire extinguishers accessible where you work?
- Are emergency exit routes free of debris and easily accessible?
- Do you have an emergency evacuation plan?
- Does your workplace have first aid kits and defibrillators distributed around the facility?

If you answered no to any of these questions, speak with your supervisor or steward to ensure your safety in an emergency.

### Lighting Hazards

When working in areas with bright lights, it is important to protect your eyes, and be prepared in case of a power outage.

- Consider wearing sunglasses when working with the lights. Your employer should provide these.
- In the event of a power outage, flashlights should be easily accessible. Consider carrying a employer provided flashlight with you, especially if you are working from heights.

### CO2 Levels

Areas with high levels of CO2 should be well ventilated. We recommend asking your employer to provide a handheld CO2 meter so you can check levels in your workspace.

Have a safety concern? Here are some steps to take:

1. Immediately notify your Union Steward AND your supervisor
2. Document the Hazard
  - a. Date/Time
  - b. Location
  - c. What is the hazard?
3. Notify your Union Rep who will help determine if we need to file a grievance



You have the right to refuse dangerous work if you follow all three of these rules: a) You can refuse work that you really believe could kill you or hurt you badly. b) You can refuse dangerous work if you have asked your employer to fix the danger. c) You can refuse dangerous work if you offer to do other, safe work until the danger is fixed. You cannot be fired for refusing unsafe work if you follow these three rules.



Need help finding your rep? Scan the QR code!

## Your Safety at a Glance



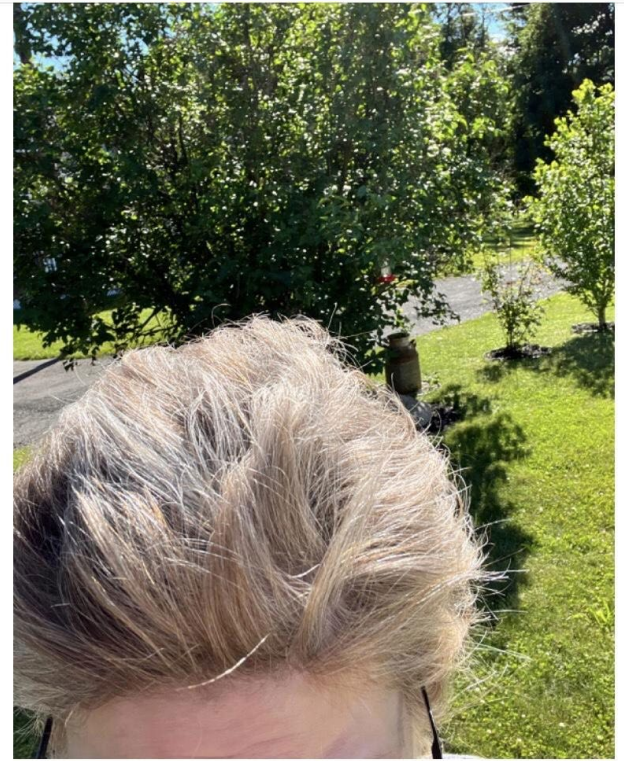
Created by Sarah and Jake from the Occupational Health Internship Program





# The Box

At least two workers exposed to reactive oxygen  
and hydrogen peroxide vapors



# Challenges

- Access to workers
  - Difficulty talking to workers without management on visits
- Response rate
  - Lack of abundant data for analysis
- Corporate confidentiality
  - No phones or pictures on visits



# Successes

## Access to Workers:

- Long meaningful conversations with stewards and workers
- Access to highly secure facilities

## Many Unique Opportunities:

- Toured many worksites in different industries
- State Capitol visit
  - Cannabis legislation
  - Tour
- Connected with different departments





# Recommendations

- Most common issues with with CO<sub>2</sub>, lighting, PPE, training, ventilation, chemical safety, and fire safety.
  - Handheld CO<sub>2</sub> devices
  - Auxiliary lighting in cultivation rooms
  - PPE: disposable gloves, fit tests for respirators
  - Training: formalized and hands-on for all machinery
  - Ventilation in grinding and trimming rooms
  - SDS available in electronic + hard copy, and training on readings
  - Fire extinguishers in all growing rooms, clear and accessible exit routes



# Sarah's Reflection

- The cannabis industry is so new, and so complex
  - The work the Union is doing to improve safety is so important especially as the industry grows
- I am grateful for all of the opportunities this summer!





# Jake's Reflection

- Existing legal protections for workers are not nearly enough
- I'm also very grateful for the opportunities we had this summer!





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