

INVESTIGATION OF WORKER HEALTH & SAFETY IN COOK COUNTY FOOD RETAILERS



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UFCW LOCAL 881

UIC SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH



Background

- Consistent industry growth
- Wage stagnation
 - High rates of poverty & hunger
 - **Double the rate of 'low' & 'very low' food security as the US population**
- Eliminating skilled positions
- Declining working conditions



UFCW Local 881

- Autonomous Local Union chartered by UFCW International
- Represents **34,000 members** working throughout IL & IN
- Members primarily employed in food & drug retail
- Local 881 is headquartered in Des Plaines, IL (near Chicago)
- UFCW International has been **Anti-ICE** since 2006



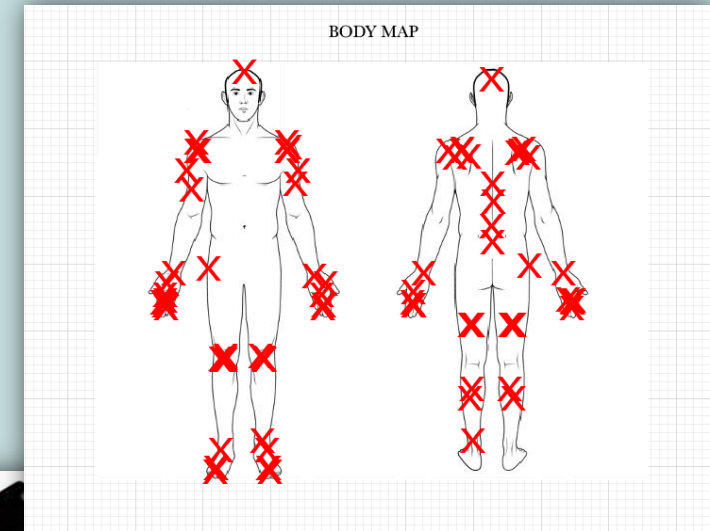
Local 881 resists the corporate cooptation of Chicago Pride

Project Goals

- Inventory hazards, accidents & injuries in non-unionized Cook County grocery stores
 - Focused on two chains: **Food 4 Less** & **Pete's Fresh Market**
- **Listen to workers' perspectives** about workplace S&H
- **Organize information** from site visits, interviews, and government records
- **Link occupational health with consumer safety**
- Produce a report that
 - **adds credibility to the fight** for better working conditions
 - provides an **impetus for municipal action** and an opportunity to **leverage State power** to hold corporations accountable

Methods

- Concept and design influenced by **Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR)**
- Observation at site visits (7)
- Semi-structured interviews (13)
 - Hazards
 - Accidents & injuries
 - Consumer safety
- **Body mapping (13)**
- **Photo-elicitation**
- Photovoice
- FOIA requests for public records



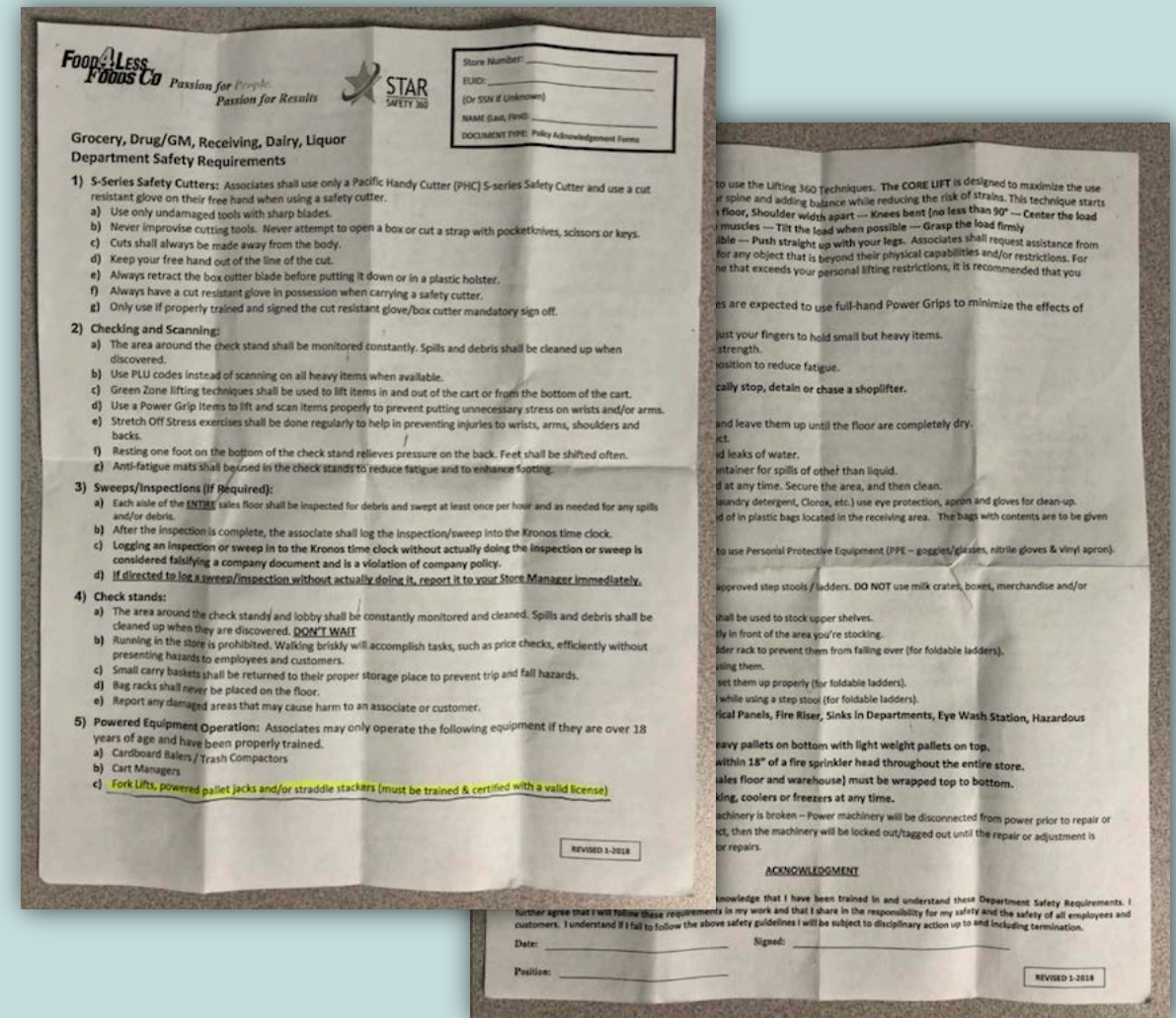
Aggregate of all body maps



Photo-elicitation materials

Themes

- **Common problems:**
 - Unfair scheduling
 - Low pay
 - Few opportunities for advancement
 - Liability-oriented training
 - Lack of procedures & guidelines
 - Unreported hazards, accidents & injuries
- **Understaffing** results in cutting corners under **production pressure**, which in turn poses **risks to consumer safety**
- Working conditions will not improve without **resource redistribution** from top to bottom, since workers do not have the capacity to implement training with current levels of understaffing and production pressure



Example of liability-oriented training

Results

Hazards

Blocked Fire Exits (9)

Broken Racks (3)

Exposed Electrical Wiring (3)

Extreme Temperature (3)

Falling Objects (2)

Faulty Equipment (13)

Fire Hazard (5)

Heavy Lifting (6)

Improper Stacking (9)

Intruder (2)

Mold (7)

Parking Lot Lighting (9)

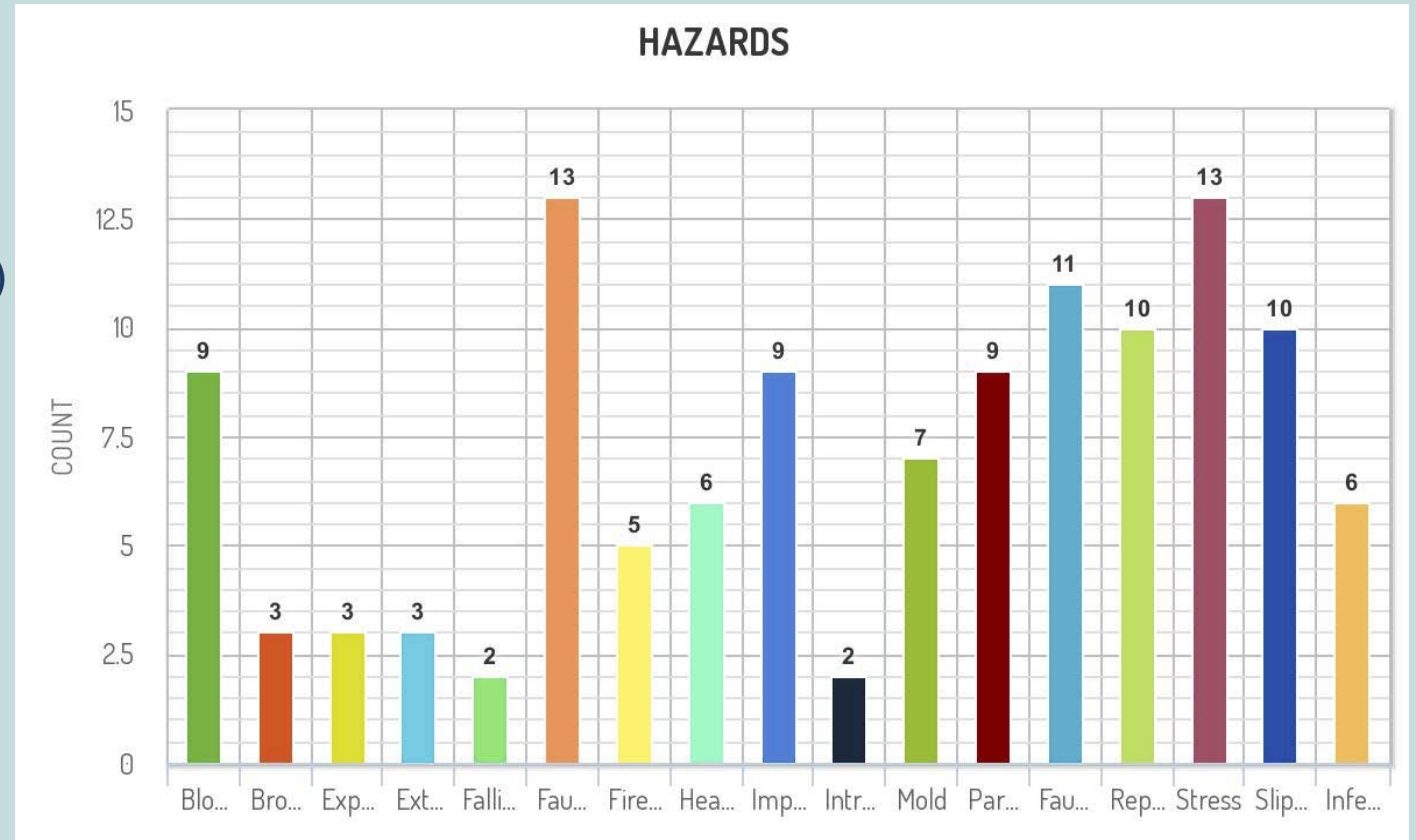
Faulty or Missing PPE (11)

Repetitive Motion (10)

Stress (13)

Slip & Fall Hazards (10)

Infestations (6)

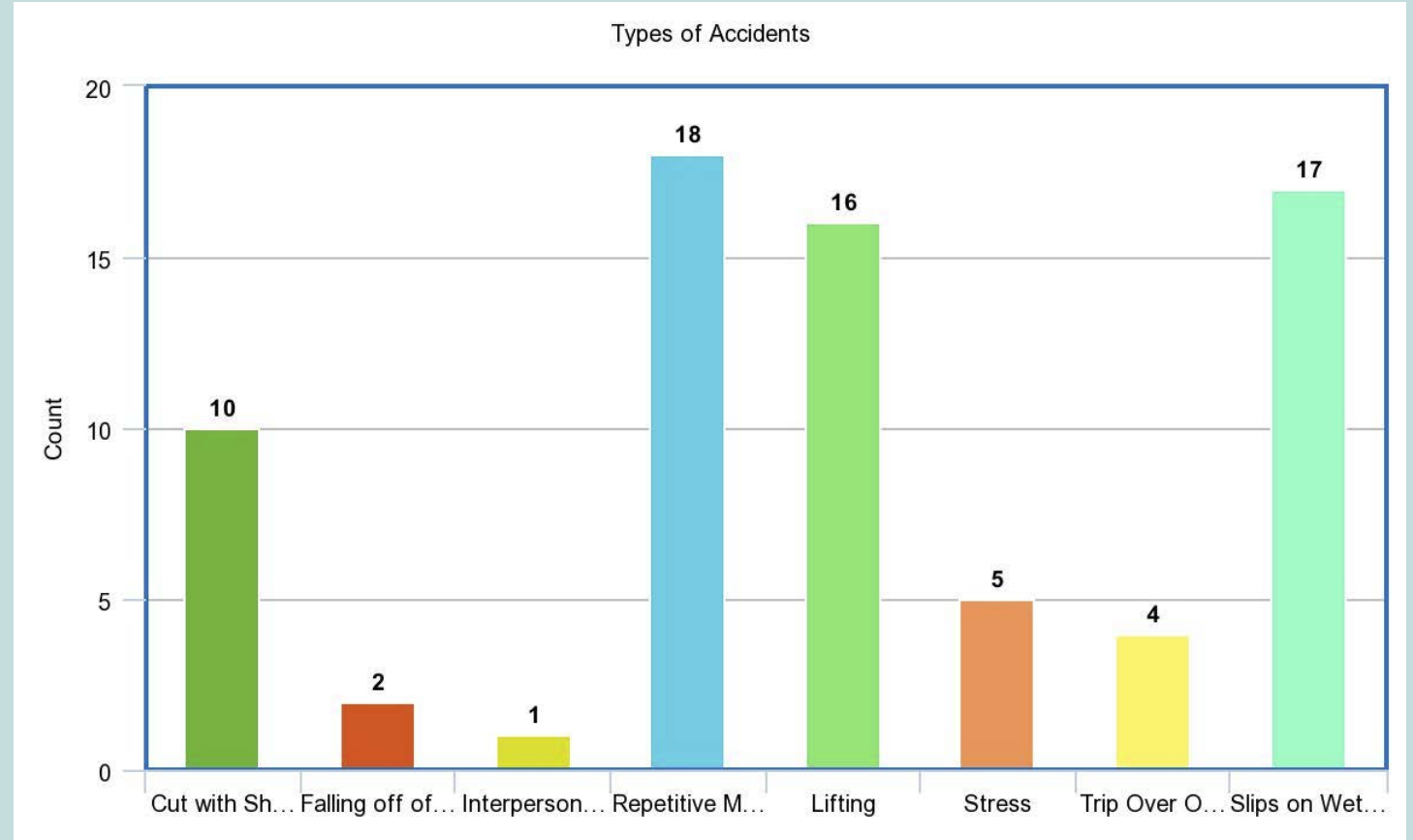


From participant interviews, site visits, worker-generated content

Results

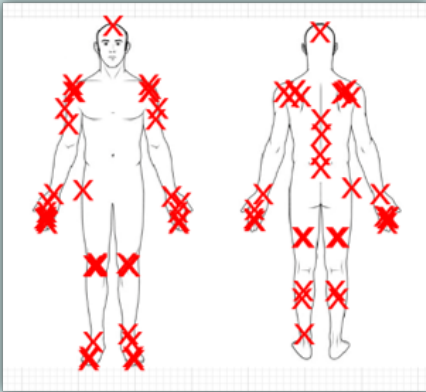
Types of Accidents

Cut with Sharp Edge (10)
Falling off of something (2)
Interpersonal Violence (1)
Repetitive Motion (18)
Lifting (16)
Stress (5)
Trip over object (4)
Slips on Wet Floors (17)



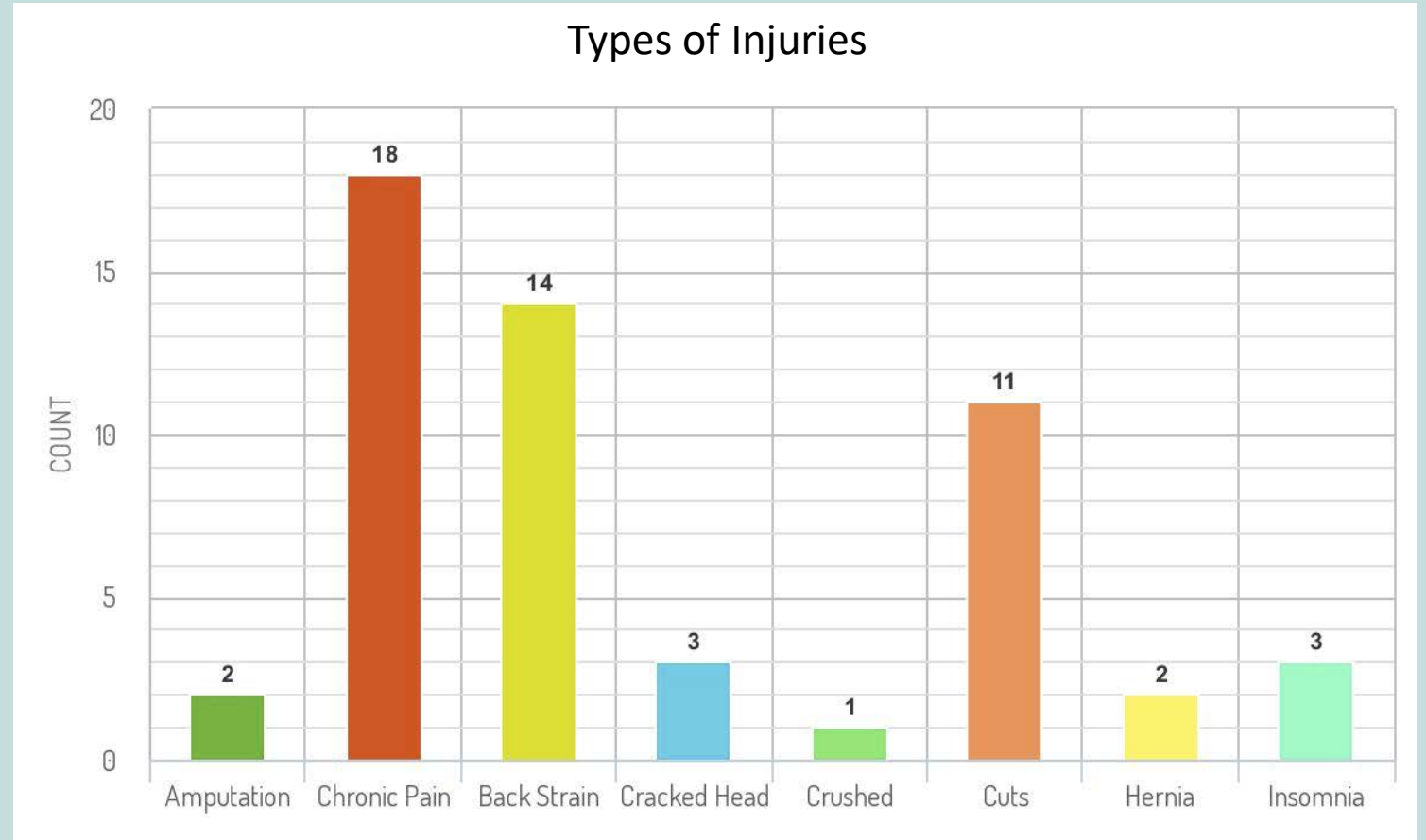
From participant interviews and body maps

Results



Types of Injuries

Amputations (2)
Chronic Pain (18)
Back Strain (14)
Cracked Head (3)
Crushed Bone (1)
Cuts (11)
Hernia (2)
Insomnia (3)



From participant interviews and body maps

Challenges

- Designing an engaging (rather than overtly bureaucratic) research process for participants
 - Photovoice
 - Photo-elicitation
- Bureaucratic challenges with regard to health inspection data
- Project originally designed for two full time interns
 - Diane has been helping with FOIA requests & background research!
 - Restricted our capacity to interview all of the workers that were already engaged with the Local and prepared to participate

Successes

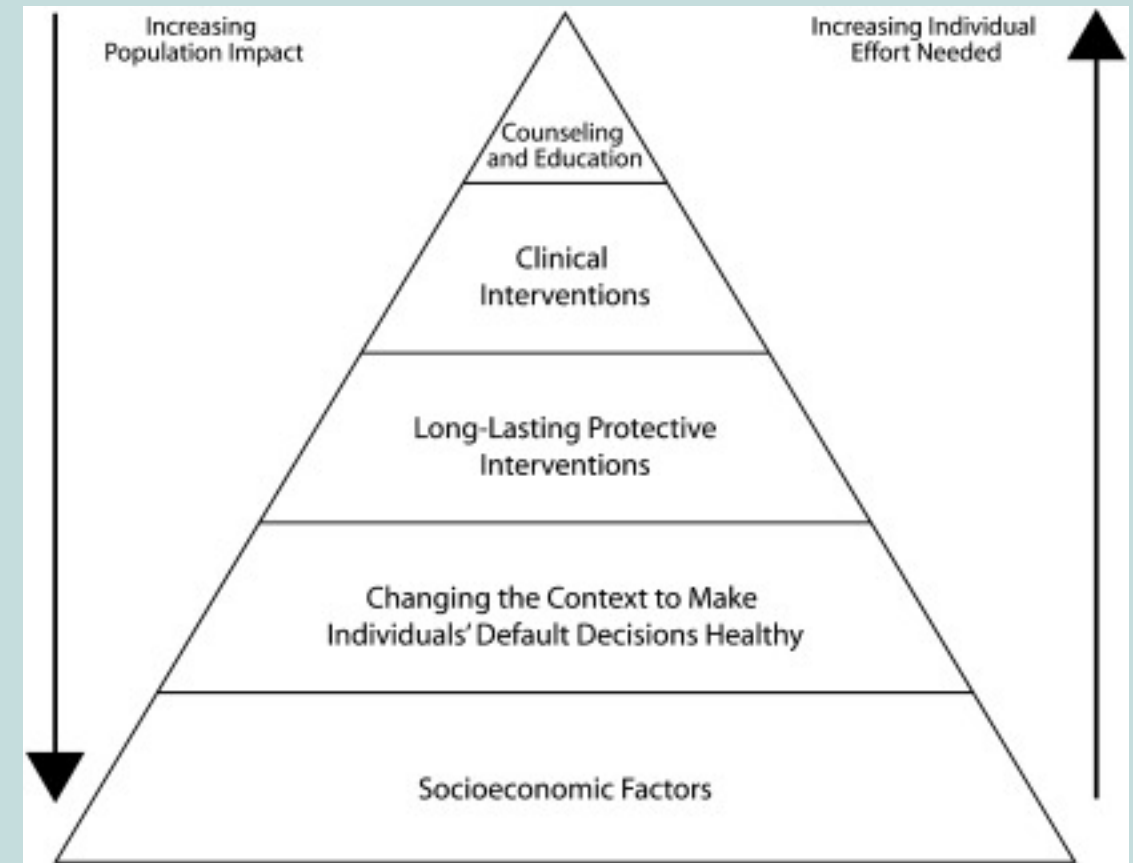
- Organizers conducted worker outreach, laying the foundation for success
- Conducted interviews with 13 workers
 - Completed two additional follow up interviews
- Workers connected their health & safety with that of consumers during interviews
- Workers submitted their own pictures of H&S hazards for the project
- Developing worker-centered food retail health and safety training



Examples of worker-generated content AKA "Photovoice"

Recommendations

- **EDUCATION:**
 - More health code, health and safety training
- **ACUTE INTERVENTIONS:**
 - Provide effective PPE and functioning equipment
 - Properly document, report, and relieve injured worker
- **LONG-LASTING PROTECTIVE INTERVENTIONS:**
 - Involving community groups and stakeholders
 - Worker health & safety committees and unionization
- **CHANGING THE CONTEXT:**
 - Public policy supporting livable wages, benefits, and fair scheduling
 - Enforcement of current and future protective policies
- **SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS:**
 - Regulate shareholder and executive profits, redistribute to workers



Health Intervention Impact Pyramid

Personal Reflections



Acknowledgements

Utmost thanks to the workers at Food4Less and Pete's who participated in this project



**The Illinois Occupational and
Environmental Health and Safety
Education and Research Center**



ASSOCIATION OF OCCUPATIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CLINICS

Calls to Action

EDUCATION:

- Educate friends and family in food retail in H&S

ACUTE INTERVENTIONS:

- Report H&S hazards where you shop

LONG-LASTING PROTECTIVE INTERVENTIONS:

- Spread information about the benefits of unionization and join the student union at your university

CHANGING THE CONTEXT:

- Keep up with local unions' political & legislative departments, Volunteer or support campaigns for worker protections

SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS:

- Get involved with organizing efforts aimed at wealth redistribution, executive salary caps, and living wages for workers

