

CURRENT TOPICS

A New Resource to Protect Temporary Workers

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Keywords: gig workers, temporary workers, best practices resource Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), employee health, immigrant/migrant workers, National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), occupational health and safety programs, nonstandard work arrangements

Temporary work is a form of nonstandard work arrangement pervading a myriad of industries with a focus on maintaining flexibility and achieving high-profit margins through provisional labor. Temporary work is “characterized by variable work schedules, reduced job security, lower wages, hazards at the workplace and stressful psychosocial working conditions” (Benach & Muntaner, 2007, p. 276), all of which endanger temporary workers’ (TW) safety and health. TW are typically hired through a third party, such as a staffing agency (SA), and perform duties for long or limited periods for a host employer (HE).

Like permanent staff, TW have the right to a safe work environment (Occupational Safety and Health Administration [OSHA], 1970). Unfortunately, research shows TW experience higher incidences of work-related injuries and illnesses compared to permanent workers (Foley, 2017). TW are more likely to be younger and from racial and ethnic minority groups compared to permanent workers (General Accountability Office, 2015), which are risk factors for work-related injuries and illnesses (Guerin et al., 2020; Seabury et al., 2017). TW are also less likely to receive adequate occupational safety and health (OSH) training and other protections (Cunningham et al., 2022). Risk is also heightened if there is no clear delineated accountability between the HE and the SA.

In response to increasing reports of injuries among TW, in 2013 OSHA put forth its Temporary Worker Initiative, which has issued numerous guidance documents outlining the joint OSH responsibilities of SA and HE. In 2022, The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and partners published *Protecting Temporary Workers: Best Practices for Host Employers* (NIOSH et al., 2022), providing in-depth best practices

regarding: evaluating and addressing OSH in a written contract; OSH training for TW and their worksite supervisors; and TW injury and illness reporting, response, and recordkeeping. This document highlights the need for a worker-centered approach to TW safety and health through ongoing collaboration and communication between the SA and HE. Checklists to foster adoption of the best practices by HE and a slide deck to facilitate communication between SA and HE are also included (NIOSH et al., 2022).

Occupational health nurses and other OSH professionals can leverage this new resource to educate HE about the best practices and facilitate communication between SA and HE. OSH professionals can help promote adoption of the best practices by engaging with HE to address and evaluate the items on the checklists. In doing so, OSH professionals can use this new resource from NIOSH and partners to promote the health and wellbeing of TW.

NIOSH disclaimer:

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Acknowledgments:

A special acknowledgment to the National Occupational Research Agenda Contingent Workers Workgroup for their role in developing *Protecting Temporary Workers: Best Practices for Host Employers*.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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