

# **DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS**

*monthly newsletter of the Toronto Organization for Domestic Workers' Rights*

September 1990

## **DOMESTIC WORKERS MUST BE INCLUDED IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT**

While most workers' health and safety in the workplace are protected by law, domestic workers, are specifically excluded from Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act

At the August 12 monthly meeting of INTERCEDE, David Leitch, lawyer/director of the Toronto Workers' Health and Safety Legal Clinic, discussed the various occupational and health hazards that affect domestic workers in their workplace, the home of their employers.

"Homemakers, in general, and domestic workers, in particular, are exposed to a whole range of occupational chemical, biological, environmental, and physical hazards. In fact, there is now a study showing that the risk of cancer among homemakers is significantly higher compared to women employed outside the home," according to Leitch. "The authors of this study conclude that their findings may be explained by homemakers' long exposures to the toxins contained in household consumer products, appliances and other activities, particularly where there is poor ventilation."

Considering what chemicals and pollutants they are exposed to everyday, and added to these, the physical and psychological stresses connected to their work, domestic workers feel that excluding them from protection in the Occupational Health

and Safety Act cannot be justified.

Leitch said that his agency had sought important changes when the Act was being reformed, including an amendment to broaden coverage to include these two major groups. But even with significant amendments made recently to the Act, two major groups, domestic workers and farmworkers, have remained outside of its protection.

Because domestic workers are not covered by the Occupational Health and Safety Act, they do not now have the right to refuse unsafe work nor the right to know about the chemicals and other agents they have to work with.

INTERCEDE cited one domestic worker's frightening experience when she did not know the contents of a strong cleaning agent her employer had given her to use to clean his office. She had asked to be supplied rubber gloves but was refused and so she used her own old pair of gloves which was worn thin. As a result, both her hands were swollen "like balloons" and she is sure this was caused by chemicals contained in the unfamiliar cleaner.

There are safer alternatives that can take the place of cleansers, detergents, disinfectants etc. Workers in the home will have to educate themselves about the hazards present in the products

***Come to INTERCEDE's monthly meeting on Sunday, September 9, 1990  
from 3 to 5 p.m. at Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street.***

***We will hold workshops:***

- 1) to discuss the problems and needs of domestic workers in connection with a needs assessment project;***
- 2) to discuss the possible outcome of the Immigration review of the Foreign Domestic Movement Program; and***
- 3) to prepare for the Annual General Meeting***

***There will be CLASP Legal Clinic but no other counselling  
as the staff will help lead workshops.***

they use, Leitch said. He distributed materials that listed potential dangers in these products and told workers that they can call the Toronto Workers' Health and Safety Legal Clinic, tel. 971-8832, to get information or advice about workplace safety and about the following hazards:

**Dangers of some home-cleaning products**

**Oven or drain cleaners (lye)** are extremely dangerous, can damage eyes, and burn skin; inhaled fumes can damage lungs. **Suggested alternatives for drains:** rubber plunger or plumber's snake; use drain strainer to prevent clogging; use hot water plus 1/4 cup washing soda. **For ovens:** use oven liners or trays to catch spills; clean spills when oven is still a bit warm; sprinkle salt on the spill then scrub or scrape hardened material with a knife; clean with damp cloth and baking soda; or mix 3 tablespoons washing soda with one quart warm water and rub gently with steel wool.

**All-purpose cleaners** can cause rash upon contact; irritate respiratory passages causing coughing or shortness of breath; enter the blood stream through mucous membranes or broken skin; repeated use can cause build up of fluid in the lungs and bronchitis; are hazardous to eyes; can burn throat and stomach lining if swallowed; products with petroleum distillates can cause a fatal lung condition. **Suggested alternatives:** for abrasive cleanser, mix 9 parts of sodium carbonate (abrasive chalk powder) with one part of soap or mild detergent; for general cleanser, mix 3 tablespoons of baking soda with one quart of water; for porcelain, dip damp cloth in baking soda and water and apply, allow to set before

scrubbing clean and rinsing; a slice of potato removes fingerprints on painted wood.

**Air fresheners** coat nasal passages with an oily film, reduces ability to smell and may have formaldehyde which causes respiratory problems and allergies. **An alternative** is to use fresh flowers or dried herbs, dish of baking soda, or simmer cloves and cinnamon in water.

**Toilet bowl cleaners (Ammonia)** can burn skin on contact or respiratory tract if inhaled so scrub with stiff brush instead. **Disinfectants** can irritate skin, eyes and throat; alternative is soap and water.

Enzymes in **dishwashing detergents** can be highly irritating, so use less; rinse dishes immediately after use; scour with stiff brush and/or salt and baking soda; soak burned pots overnight, boil, cool and scour. **Automatic dishwashing detergents** may be irritating to skin, eyes, and respiratory tract; tend to leave residue on dishes. **Alternative** would be to use less; vinegar in rinse cuts spotting and leaves less residue.

**Laundry detergents** defat natural skin oils; break down protective layer of skin allowing toxic substances and allergens to enter the blood stream; enzymes, optical brighteners and perfums can cause allergic reactions; powder dusts irritate the respiratory tract. **Alternatives** include using biodegradable detergents; make paste of washing soda and water for dirty spots; use full loads of clothes and the least amount of detergents; wear gloves when washing by hand; store tightly closed. Liquid laundry detergents do not contain sodium carbonate, a corrosive present in detergent powders.

We wish to thank the Employment and Immigration Canada (Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program); Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Women's Program); Ontario Ministry of Citizenship; Ontario Women's Directorate; the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto (Community and Social Services); and the City of Toronto for their continuing support.

**NEW SUBSCRIPTION:**

**CHANGE OF ADDRESS:**

**MAIL TO:** INTERCEDE, 489 College St., Suite 402, Toronto, Ontario M6G 1A5

Please send DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS to:

**NAME:** .....

**ADDRESS:** .....

**CITY/PROVINCE:** .....

**POSTAL CODE:** ..... **TELEPHONE:** .....

**YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION RATES:**

Intercede Members:	FREE	Non-member Domestic	\$ 5.00
Non-Profit Organizations	FREE	Others	\$10.00

**MEMBERS AND FRIENDS:**  
*you are invited to the*  
**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**  
*and*  
**ELECTION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

*Sunday, October 14, 1990, 2:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.*  
*Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street (corner Spadina), Toronto*

<b>2:30 - 3:15</b>	<b><i>Reports and Election of the Board</i></b>
<b>3:15 - 4:30</b>	<b><i>Program</i></b>
<b>4:30 - 5:30</b>	<b><i>Refreshments</i></b>

***All members up to July 1990 are qualified to vote by showing their INTERCEDE membership card.***

***Friends, Supporters and Volunteers of INTERCEDE are requested to please call 324-8751 to confirm your attendance as space and refreshments are limited.***

***(No application for membership will be accepted at the Annual General Meeting)***

**Spot removers** have fumes that can irritate eyes, nose and throat; can cause skin rash upon contact, dizziness and nausea; repeated exposure can damage kidneys, liver and central nervous system. **Alternatives** are to remove spots as soon as they happen: for blood stains, gently sponge with cold water and dry with a towel repeatedly; for stains on rugs and upholstery, dab out moisture, cover with salt or club soda and let sit, then vacuum when dry; for ink stains, soak in cold water then wash. For stains on white fabric, wet with cold water and apply a paste of cream of tartar and lemon juice, let stand for an hour then wash as usual.

**Pesticides** irritate skin, eyes, mucous membranes and lungs; can cause damage to liver and kidneys; can cause miscarriages, birth defects and cancer. **Alternative** would be to use plaster to plug holes and cracks; set out equal parts of baking soda and sugar; sprinkle borax under baseboards, stove and refrigerator. Borax must be kept out of reach of children because it is moderately toxic, but not nearly as dangerous as pesticides.

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE**

*(Excerpts from a presentation and materials given by David Leitch, Lawyer/Director, Toronto Workers' Health and Safety Clinic; and "Health Hazards of Household Work" published by South Riverdale Community Health Centre (461-2494))*

**HOW TO CALCULATE YOUR PAY  
EFFECTIVE OCTOBER 1, 1990**

	MONTHLY (12/Year)	BIWEEKLY (26/Year)	WEEKLY (52/Year)
<b>GROSS WAGES*</b>	\$1029.60	\$ 475.20	\$273.60
<b>DEDUCTIONS</b>			
Room & Board**	290.33	134.00	67.00
Income Tax***	126.85	58.30	38.50
Can Pension Plan	17.52	8.09	4.83
Unemployment Ins	23.17	10.69	6.16
<b>NET PAY</b>	<b>571.73</b>	<b>264.12</b>	<b>157.11</b>

**NOTES:**

\*Gross Wages are based on a 44 hour week with no overtime.

\*\*Board is calculated at the rate of \$2.00 per meal or no more than \$42.00 per week. You should get an extra \$2.00 in your pay for each meal that you don't eat at your employer's home. For example, if you leave your employer's house on Saturday after breakfast and return on Sunday night after supper, you should get an extra \$10.00 in your pay (5 meals x \$2.00 = \$10.00). Room is calculated at the rate of \$25.00/week for a private room and 12.50/week for a shared room.

\*\*\*Income Tax deductions are based on Code 1 exemptions. If you are supporting dependent children, your tax deductions will be lower and your net pay will be higher. Income tax is calculated on gross wages.

**COCO'S CALENDAR**

Ed's note:

Staff member Coco Tarape Diaz is recuperating from an appendectomy. The Board and staff wish her fast recovery and a good rest. In place of her column, we are quoting from a letter written by Effie Henry:

*"Thanks for keeping me informed of what is happening. The Remedios Taaca case (July'90 newsletter) is a sad one. I trust that all the women that are not yet landed will learn a lesson from that because when it comes to the Immigration, not every one can be lucky... Please continue to do the great and wonderful work that you are doing. A lot of us can say that if it had not been for INTERCEDE, we would not be still in Canada."*

**ORIENTATION FOR NEWLY-ARRIVED  
DOMESTIC WORKERS**

**Sunday, September 16, 1990**

**10 am - 5 pm**

**St. Anne's Parish Church Hall**

Cor. Gerrard & Degross (2 blocks east of Broadview)

Free admission to those who have registered only.

Lunch will be provided

**IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS**

Canada Immigration Centre	973-4444
Employment Standards Enforcement	326-7160
Revenue Canada (Taxation)	869-1500
Immigrant Women's Job Placement Centre	656-8933
Educ & Skills Training Ctr, Labour Council	971-5893
Toronto Rape Crisis Centre (24-hour line)	597-8808

**LEGAL SERVICES**

Parkdale Community Legal Services	531-2411
CLASP (Osgoode Law School) Legal Clinic	736-5029
Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Serv.	363-0304
Metro Tor. Chinese & SE Asian Legal Clinic	971-9674
Toronto Workers' Health & Safety Legal Clinic	971-8832

**EMERGENCY HOUSING**

Nellie's Hostel	461-1084
Evangeline's	762-9636

Unemployment Insurance	730-1211
Ontario Human Rights Commission	326-9511
OHIP	965-1000
Immigrant Women's Health Centre	367-1388

**INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT**

Place: 489 College St., Suite 402, Toronto, Ontario  
 Time: Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.  
 Telephone: (416) 324-8751

**INTERCEDE STAFF**

Coordinator/Editor:  
 Counsellors:

**DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS**

c/o INTERCEDE  
 489 College St., Suite 402  
 Toronto, Ontario  
 M6G 1A5

**FIRST CLASS**