



Centre for  
Research Expertise  
in Occupational Disease

# Research Flash

APRIL 2015

- New-immigrant workers were afraid that speaking up regarding health and safety risks at work could put them at risk of losing their job
- Employers didn't always follow up to make sure new-immigrant workers understood health and safety training
- Descriptive images could help new-immigrant workers understand their rights at work

## GOING BEYOND WORDS TO INCREASE PREVENTION AWARENESS

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**Issue:** The Ministry of Labour has identified vulnerable workers, including immigrant workers, as a group at increased risk of work-related injury and disease.

Work by the Bramalea Community Health Centre has suggested that literal translation of materials isn't enough to reach this group; a gap remains between efforts to make occupational health and safety messages accessible to new-immigrant workers and their understanding of those messages. Part of this may be related to language, but research suggests that other cultural factors may prevent new-immigrant workers from understanding and implementing basic principles of the occupational health and safety act, such as the right of information, participation or work refusal.

The Ministry of Labour has produced a new awareness poster that every workplace must post to increase awareness of the occupational health and safety principles and worker rights.

**What we did:** We were interested in evaluating the use of drawings to convey health and safety messages among immigrant workers.

CREOD and the Bramalea Community Health Centre (BCHC), with the support of Workplace Safety and Prevention Services, worked with an artist to develop illustrations to depict key components of the Ministry of Labour poster.

We conducted interviews with seven recent immigrants from the South Asian community, to learn more about their experiences of health and safety at work in Canada. We also conducted a focus group with three participants to find out how well they understood and what they thought could be improved about the Ministry of Labour poster as well as the images developed by the artist.

All participants were able to speak and understand English.

**Findings:** New-immigrant workers face multiple barriers to occupational health and safety. Reported barriers include:

- **Workers were afraid that speaking up regarding health and safety risks at work could put them at risk of losing their job.** Participants expressed concerns about who to trust in the workplace. They said that it was extremely difficult for them to find employment and often conditions were better than in their home country; once employed, they felt tremendous pressure to keep their jobs
- **Employers didn't always follow up to make sure workers understood health and safety training.** However most experiences with health and safety training in Canada were positive

New-immigrant workers felt that the following could improve their health and safety at work:

- **Better government enforcement** could put pressure on employers to ensure a safe environment for workers
- **A positive and collaborative attitude** between employer and employee could encourage reporting

This study demonstrated the value of using descriptive images in awareness posters for new-immigrant workers. Participants told us:

- **The image-rich poster was easy to understand.** They felt that the concepts represented were understandable even without the text
- **The information on the Ministry of Labour poster was too wordy and quasi-legalistic;** this could prove challenging for workers with poorer language skills. However the bold headings and sections helped make it more understandable
- Although the Ministry of Labour poster states that employers must not take action against workers for raising health and safety issues, **participants wanted to see more reassurance on the poster that they would be protected**
- Finally, workers noted that using a combination of images and text would allow for different comprehension styles

### Contact:

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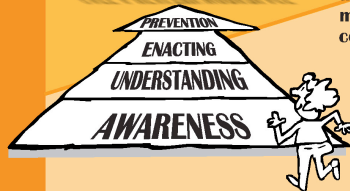
## Going Beyond Words to Increase Prevention Awareness

# IMAGES MAKE IT EASIER TO UNDERSTAND HEALTH & SAFETY MESSAGES!

### Drawing Conclusions:



### SAFE & HEALTHY WORKPLACE



Concept of the exchange and joint responsibility mostly understood, but could be made clearer!

### The Graphics

Employers and workers both play a role to support each other.

Sense of shared responsibility.

It's a collaborative cycle.



Images: nice and clear with simple captions. Pictures will get concept across even if language is not understood.

### Emerging Pictures:

The MoL Poster  
Relevant, but generic.

Belongs in HR office.

Wordy, too much info.

Need good language skills to understand.



People don't have time to read all this.

Clear sense of what it is; good segmentation.

Good to have contact number.

Is advertising for the MoL.

The rules are clear!  
It's putting them into practice.



What is the MoL poster saying to you...?

Does the poster or do the graphics make it easier to understand health & safety issues at work..

What makes it easier or harder to understand..?

Can you give me an example of how the poster information relates to your job & and workplace...?

What was your work experience in your home country...and in Canada..?

Any workplace injuries or illnesses...?

Did you receive health & safety training..?

Understanding new immigrants experiences of health & safety issues



How could we improve the drawings and captions to make them more relevant to you...?

What are the illustrations saying to you... what aspects of the drawings make it easier or harder to understand....?

In your workplace, what do you and your employer, do to ensure a safe workplace...?

7 people interviewed  
1 on 1

SCOTT

### The Data:

### The Interviews: