



Center for Worker Health

Wake Forest University School of Medicine

POLICY BRIEF

Meeting the Requirements for Occupational Safety and Sanitation for Migrant Farmworkers in North Carolina

Purpose



This policy brief describes migrant farmworker experiences with components of the US-EPA Worker Protection Standard and the OSHA safety and sanitation regulations. Based on these results, we present recommendations to improve safety and sanitation conditions for farmworkers. Information for this policy brief is based on data collected by Wake Forest University School of Medicine investigators from 255 migrant farmworkers who were interviewed at monthly intervals from May through August 2007.

Background





The US-EPA has established pesticide safety regulations for agricultural workers through the Worker Protection Standard. OSHA has established field safety and sanitation regulations that apply to all agricultural workers, and residential safety and sanitation regulations that apply to migrant farmworkers. In North Carolina, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is responsible for enforcing pesticide safety as outlined in the Worker Protection Standard; and the Department of Labor is responsible for enforcing OSHA field and residential safety and sanitation regulations.

Findings




Pesticide Safety Training

-  About 20% of the migrant farmworkers did not receive pesticide safety training at any time during the agricultural season.
-  About 1/3 of those who received pesticide safety training reported that they did not understand this information.

Sanitation and Safety in the Fields

-  About 20% of migrant farmworkers reported lacking individual cups for drinking water.
-  Lack of water for washing hands increased to more than 1/3 in late season.
-  About 1/2 of migrant farmworkers reported having no soap available for hand washing.
-  About 60% reported having no disposable towels available for hand washing.

Meeting Residential Sanitation Requirements

-  About 3% of migrant workers lived in camps with more than 10 workers for each working showerhead.
-  About 20% of migrant workers lived in camps with more than 8 workers for each working showerhead.
-  About 20% lived in camps with more than 30 workers for each laundry washtub or washing machine.

Policy Implications

Current safety and sanitation regulations meant to reduce occupational hazards among migrant farmworkers are not being attained. Greater enforcement of these regulations is required. Current regulations, such as having a working shower for ten or fewer migrant workers or a laundry tub or washing machine for 30 or fewer migrant workers, may not be sufficient to provide a safe environment for these workers.

Recommendations

Several steps can be taken to improve safety and sanitation conditions for farmworkers.

- Agricultural employers should be educated about pesticide exposure among their workers and the steps that they can take to reduce this exposure.
- The number of inspectors for pesticide, field, and housing safety and sanitation needs to be increased so that all farms can be inspected annually.
- Inspections for pesticide, field, and housing safety need to be conducted regularly throughout the agricultural season.
- Penalties for violating pesticide, field, and housing safety standards need to be assessed and increased.

Further Information

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