Workers At Risk Essay, Research Paper

Workers at Risk

In the book “Workers at Risk” the authors, Dorothy Nelkin and Michael S. Brown, interviewed a number of “working class” people. The authors enticed workers to discuss their major concerns regarding occupational health and safety. Almost all the interviewed workers had some complaints regarding the subject and some seemed quite upset in regards to their complaints. The authors, however, did not interview management in order to receive responses to workers concerns. Thus we have no concrete inside into this side of the issue. However, this paper will attempt to show how management may respond to the issue and will also decipher the major concerns expressed by the workers.

A general feeling one gets from reading the interviews is that workers feel that they only receive very limited information in regards to hazardous materials they are using. Workers tend to feel that management has a paternalistic attitude towards them and that they know what is best for the worker. Management, on the other hand, may suggest that there is a lack of information regarding many of the issues regarding health and safety and that a unwarranted “panic” may in- sue if information is released without sufficient evidence. There also seems to be many suggestions that management feels that it is the worker’s own fault for many ill-effects. That is workers are unwilling to use proper precautions or their life styles may play large roles in ill effects.

Workers also implied that once they are experiencing symptoms that without adequate proof they have no way of confronting management. This, in-turn, caused many workers to keep quiet about their problems; either because it was “their problem” or it was “just part of the job”. Some workers even felt that reporting may lead to retribution. But most just felt that their complaints would be disputed of dismissed. As is evident by Joe’s (laboratory, chemical plant) statement, ” … a couple of neurologist told me it was linked to phosgene, but its something you could never prove. There is no use fighting it” (Nelkin and Brown, pg.26). On the other side of the coin, management could counter with lack of knowledge. That is, if the workers do not bother to confront them with their problems there is nothing they can do about them. From there management could also suggest that if workers are unwilling to report symptoms, that it may be because of guilty consciousness. In other words workers are not taking proper precautions.

Other aspects were workers showed concerns is that of been able to associate their ill-effects to their working environment. There seems to be a feeling that many times they know what is causing the problem, such as feeling sick every Thursday when a certain chemical is poured, yet they are unable to document their experiences. Workers suggest that due to their limited ability to receive information they are unable to process proper data; which may isolate the cause of their illness. Here management would be very hesitant to give a large amount of concern to this issue, especially if they follow proper procedures and regulations. Management could simply state that all levels are within government set regulations and thus there is no need for concern.

This above mentioned management response of being within regulations would also undoubtedly be used for other worker concerns. Such as the “scared factor” experienced by many of those interviewed. These workers felt very un-easy about certain smells and textures. There was also allot of concern in regards to future unknown factors. Workers expressed great fear of the lag time effects of the products they were using. Once again for these complaints management would simply state that all that can be done is to follow proper procedure and regulations.

This short analysis has shown that there seems to be a wide disparity between workers and management. Workers are increasingly becoming conscious of health concerns and how they are associated to their working environment. Yet the “system”does not seem able to keep up and answer these concerns. This was described in the paper by showing the difference between worker and management attitudes regarding the main issues expressed by workers.