

Most Latino laborers use safety gear when available, study finds

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A study of Latino day laborers in Chicago found that they used personal protective equipment for 94 percent of the jobs they performed, likely preventing occupational injuries.

Researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago partnered with the Latino Union of Chicago, a support organization for day laborers, to distribute nine types of [personal protective equipment](#), or PPE, at no cost to the [workers](#) during six distribution sessions.

"Typically, day laborers are hired by small contractors or homeowners and often don't know what type of work they will be doing, so they usually do not have any personal [protective equipment](#) with them," says Dr. Susan Buchanan, clinical assistant professor of environmental and occupational health sciences at the UIC School of Public Health and lead author of the study. "The Latino Union has found that many workers are not using any personal protective equipment, yet they are performing extremely hazardous jobs."

The workers often wait on street corners or in parking lots of big-box home improvement stores and are mainly found in public waiting for employers to pick them up for work each day.

The researchers, using a health fair model, provided the day laborers with a hard hat, respirator, goggles, safety sunglasses, overalls, work gloves, knee pads, steel insoles and earplugs. The events were held at the Latino Union Worker Center, a community park where the workers play

soccer, a church hall, and a parking lot near one of the hiring sites.

The workers received educational information and brief training on each piece of protective equipment before receiving a duffle bag full of PPE at the end of the session.

The researchers contacted the participants four to eight weeks later to find out which PPE they had used, which worked best for them, and what tasks were performed while using the equipment.

There were 117 participants in the study, and 42 completed the follow-up survey. Due to the transient nature of the population, many of the workers were lost to follow-up.

The researchers found that the day laborers were performing mostly construction activities -- demolition, painting, landscaping, roofing, putting up or taking down drywall, laying floors -- and the PPE they reported using most often were gloves (60 percent), safety glasses and respirators (52 percent).

The least frequently used PPE were coveralls (33 percent), earplugs (31 percent), and hard hats (29 percent).

"Overall the workers' assessment of the program was extremely positive," Buchanan said.

The goal of the study is to prevent occupational injuries, Buchanan said, and using personal protective equipment is one way to help. Another is by having employers provide PPE at the workplace or by designing tasks to prevent injury.

The study, published in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, was funded by the Institute of Medicine Chicago Portes Center and the

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