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Morris workshops focus on safety for Hispanic laborers

Morristown Neighborhood House, OSHA form alliance

KAYLA HASTRUP
STAFF WRITER

MORRISTOWN -- The Morristown Neighborhood House has formed an alliance with the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration to try to reduce workplace accidents and fatalities among Hispanic workers in construction and industry.

"We're helping to make sure our workers are safe and minimize workplace injuries," said David Walker, executive director for Morristown Neighborhood House. "They all need jobs and want to work hard, but they need to be safe."

The Neighborhood House has a program known as "pathways to work" that links day laborers with employers. OSHA will work within the program to offer a wide variety of workshops for workers and employers.

"We want to make sure our workers know the rules of the road," Walker said. Some specific things the workshops will teach them include: what sort of safety equipment an employer should have, what sort of training should be provided prior to working, and what the recourse is if an injury is sustained.

"By working together, the two organizations hope to reduce workplace accidents," said Lenore Fortson, an OSHA spokeswoman.

In 2006, 990 Hispanics died as a result of work-related accidents, Fortson said.

"I think there is a concern with the language barrier," Fortson said. "It's an obstacle that we hope to work against ... it's important to make sure that the information that identifies hazards is available in both English and Spanish and there are people that are educated in these issues."

Although the "ink is still wet" in regards to the alliance and the first workshop was held last week, according to Walker, they are eager to hold more workshops and continue the ongoing alliance. "We're excited to have another resource available here at the Neighborhood House," Walker said. "We want to make sure working people are protected."

The Neighborhood House was founded in 1898 as a settlement house that helped Italian immigrants become acclimated with American culture. Its missions is to help new immigrants and low-income families foster cross-cultural relationships. MNH operates eight sites throughout Morris County.

OSHA currently has more than 470 safety and health alliances throughout the nation as part of the agency's ongoing efforts to improve the health and safety of employees through cooperative partnerships with trade associations, labor organizations, employers and government agencies, according to the agency.

For more information about the alliance or about worker safety issues, call 973-263-1003.
