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the injury is lasting longer or causing them to miss more work than expected.

She said lying about the cause of an injury upfront can be detrimental to the outcome of the claim.

"It's pretty severe when you've had an amputation at work and you're not reporting it as an on-the-job injury," she said. "Many of these workers, even after talking to our office, and we've explained what their rights are, regardless of documentation, they have a very strong fear of filing a claim through the system. They're afraid it will impact their job, their other family members' jobs. They're concerned about being able to stay here."

Between 2010 and 2014, there were 556 accepted disabled workers compensation claims filed by forestry workers, but with many fearful of filing, that number is likely a drop in the bucket.

**W**ith inadequate government oversight, forestry workers' family members are fighting for improvements.

In the Medford area, a small group of women go door to door looking for workers. They go to the general store where they buy hard hats and boots, and to the laundromats and markets on weekends.

They call themselves the "Promotoras," or promotion girls, and they are the wives, aunts, sisters and mothers of past and present forestry workers. The Promotoras outreach is a program of the Northwest Forest Workers Center. They distribute fliers with information about workers' rights and resources, and they offer training on accident prevention, chainsaw safety and how to survive outdoors. They give workers booklets to record the hours they work.

Since 2011, they've trained more than 300 forest workers on how to stay safe on the job.

All four women Street Roots spoke with relayed various tales of worker abuse they have heard from their husbands and the men they train. From shoddy camping conditions and rotten food to dangerous working conditions and wage theft, these women are well-versed on the abuses within Oregon's forests.

"If you go and ask the workers, just one out of every 40 or 50 is going to say they're not being mistreated. No one is going to tell you that they're being treated fairly," said Promotora Erika.

"The way you see your husband when they come back from planting trees – they're hurt," she said.

"They don't have a voice," said Virginia Camberos, the Promotora program coordinator. "More than anything, they're afraid. They're afraid to say anything."

Through a translator, Promotora Matha said her husband once broke his big toe when a tree crushed it. The crew wasn't scheduled to leave the

worksite for 15 more days, and his supervisors made him work on his broken toe until the job was done. During that time it became infected.

Both Erika and Martha asked that Street Roots omit their last names because their advocacy could affect their family members' ability to find work, they said.

Even for the Promotoras it's difficult to get workers to talk. Promotora Gladiola Garcia said, also with the help of a translator, that one time a foreman had the Promotoras chased away from a motel where workers were staying. Other times workers told her they wanted to speak to her but couldn't because their boss was nearby. Supervisors have thrown out their pamphlets after they leave, and workers have told them they could fired just for listening to them.

The Promotoras often visit motels where H-2B workers are housed. These workers are typically from Mexico or Guatemala. They are granted temporary, seasonal visas to visit the U.S. for work. They don't speak English, and sometimes they don't speak Spanish either, but Indigenous languages, making them particularly susceptible to exploitation.

In 2013, there were more than 800 forestry and conservation positions open to these guest workers across the state. At the start of 2016, U.S. Forest Service in Oregon and Washington had 104 active contracted operations staffed by guest workers, totaling \$9.5 million.

Lately, said the Promotoras, guest workers seem to be getting younger.

"What we've seen recently is many, many, young, 18-year-olds are coming out, and they know nothing, they have no sort of training," said Camberos.

Some workers have told the women their supervisors hold their visas hostage the entire time they are in the U.S., and that they treat them like animals, said Erika and Camberos.

The Promotoras said for years, many forestry workers have been reluctant to speak up for their rights, but now, as they see their sons and nephews take jobs in the forest, they have become motivated to change the industry.

**I**boa credits his father's hard work and encouragement for his own ability to break free from what he calls the "perpetual cycle" many of his cousins are caught in. "I escaped it because I went to school," he said.

He began to see a bigger picture while studying sociology at the University of Oregon. Organizing with the campus MEChA chapter and learning about environmental justice, he said he began to think about his family. He began to think about how they all went to work under dangerous conditions, exposed to toxic chemicals with little protections. But then when they came home, the exposure didn't stop – he, his uncles and cousins

all lived in the most polluted areas of West Eugene.

"I saw the experiences of my family growing up as basically these ghosts – these smaller representations of these larger powers at work," he said. "A policy, like trying to cut corners by not putting a protective cover on something, might be a way for them to save some money – but that's someone's arm."

About a year ago he saw a Craigslist ad for an opening at an environmental advocacy group in Eugene called Beyond Toxics. One thing on its agenda was protecting farm and forestry workers from harmful pesticides and herbicides.

"I knew this was my job," he said. Now, at age 24, he's been the Environmental Justice and Community Outreach Manager at Beyond Toxics in Eugene for one year.

As he's learned more about the effects of herbicides and the toxic chemicals used in sawmills, he said he can't help but wonder if his mother was washing his father's clothes with his baby clothes years ago – or if the exposure could have had an effect on her pregnancy with him.

On Feb. 5 he will travel north from Eugene to Salem to listen as state regulators discuss worker issues he's helped bring out of Oregon's forest and fields and before members of the governor's Environmental Justice Task Force.

The task force first heard testimony from immigrant forestry and agricultural workers, the Promotoras, Iboa and Wilmsen this past fall.

Workers testified they were exposed to toxic pesticides and herbicides and believe they have health problems such as liver, kidney and nervous system damage as a result. They testified about not getting breaks, retaliation for complaining and having only dirty water to drink.

At the following task force meeting in December, Iboa urged members to take action rather than waiting to see if proposed EPA pesticide application rules get approved.

"Why can't Oregon have something more robust – and enforcement of existing laws?" he asked.

Iboa and his colleague, Beyond Toxics Executive Director Lisa Akin, see the presence of BOLI's commissioner and OSHA's administrator at Friday's meeting as a monumental step in their effort to protect forestry and farmworkers from dangerous exposure toxics and to combat workers' fear of retaliation in reporting their injuries.

Beyond Toxics signed off on a letter, along with Oregon Action, Northwest Forest Workers Center and farmworker activist groups PCUN and UNETE, asking the task force to bring their requests to Governor Kate Brown, as changes to the system that perpetuates worker abuses will need to come from the top down.

*Next: In Part II in this series, Street Roots will explore the role of government regulators and land management agencies, as well as contractors.*



Street Roots is proud to be a member of the global street paper movement and honored to serve the readers of Portland and Multnomah County.