



DIRTY THREADS, DANGEROUS FABRIQUES:

Health and Safety in Los Angeles' Fashion Industry



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Los Angeles, which houses the largest cut and sew apparel base in the U.S., is the center of the country's garment manufacturing industry. While a number of recent studies have focused on the wage and hour labor experiences of California's garment workers, there is an absence of research on the specific health and safety conditions faced by these workers in Los Angeles. *Dirty Threads, Dangerous Factories: Health and Safety in Los Angeles' Fashion Industry* is a direct response to the concerns expressed by garment workers and worker advocates and provides insights into the health, safety and environmental conditions of this sector.

Los Angeles Garment Worker Center worker organizers and worker leaders surveyed 307 workers in the greater L.A. area between June and December of 2015. This survey and subsequent focus group sessions with workers paint a descriptive portrait of the health and safety landscape of L.A.'s garment sector. Our findings indicate that the conditions in the city's garment workplaces are deeply unsafe and unhealthy for many of those who make what is stocked at popular clothing shops and department stores. The report's key findings include:

Factories are Dusty, Hot, and Poorly Ventilated

72% of respondents indicated their factories were brimming with dust;

60% reported that excessive heat and dust accumulation was due to poor ventilation that rendered it difficult to work, and even to breathe;

Factories are Dirty

47% observed that workplace bathrooms were soiled and unmaintained;

42% of the garment workers surveyed had seen rats and mice in the factories where they sew;

Factories are Dangerous and Unsafe

42% reported that exits and doors in their shops were regularly blocked;

49% told our team that there were no first aid kits available on site;

82% had never received any health or safety training at their workplace.

These findings point to major health and safety concerns in an industry plagued by workplace violations and marked by a lack of worker protections.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Dirty Threads, Dangerous Factories: Health and Safety in Los Angeles' Fashion Industry recommends urgent changes in the industry. These include:

- 1. Make retailers and brands responsible not only for wage theft and wage and hour violations, but also for the unhealthy and unsafe workplace violations consistently committed by subcontractors producing their garments.**
- 2. Implement and support indoor heat standards for all indoor workers in California, and especially in the garment industry.**
- 3. End the piece rate system. Workers rarely earn a just living wage through this system of compensation. Although the piece rate is promoted as an incentive for workers to earn more by working quickly, it has in fact created new opportunities for wage theft and contributed to an unsafe and unhealthy workplace.**
- 4. Actively promote new citywide standards to fill current gaps in worker protections.**