

**NARRATIVE REPORT
FOR
Developing World Outreach Initiative (DWOI)
On
Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)**

I. GENERAL SUMMARY OF (OSH) IN CAMBODIA

Current Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Conditions in Cambodia's Garment Factories:

The Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Union (C.CAWDU) is one of Cambodia's most influential labour unions, representing workers in the garment and footwear industries. C.CAWDU has grown its membership significantly, especially in the garment sector, where it advocates for workers' rights, fair wages, and better working conditions. The union is pivotal in negotiations with employers and the government, particularly on issues like minimum wage adjustments and workplace safety.

Coalition of Cambodian Garment Workers' Democratic Union (C.CAWDU), as representatives of the workers in Cambodia's garment sector, we, the trade union, are deeply committed to ensuring the safety, health, and dignity of the roughly 700,000 workers-predominantly young women-who toil in the factories producing garments for global brands. The garment industry remains the backbone of Cambodia's economy, contributing significantly to export earnings and employing a vast workforce. However, despite some progress over the years, Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) conditions in these factories continue to fall short of what workers deserve. Persistent challenges such as inadequate safety measures, excessive heat, poor ventilation, and limited access to protective equipment undermine the well-being of our members. Below, we outline the current OSH landscape based on our observations and the experiences shared by workers.

II. Persistent OSH Challenges:

One of the most pressing OSH concerns in garment factories is the lack of robust safety management systems. Many factories fail to implement proper policies, procedures, or clear divisions of responsibility for maintaining safe working environments. This gap leaves workers vulnerable to preventable hazards. For instance, providing personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks, gloves, or needle guards for sewing machines remains inconsistent. In some factories, workers report that functioning needle guards are either absent or poorly maintained, increasing the risk of injuries. Similarly, fire safety remains a critical issue. While emergency exits and fire extinguishers are present in some facilities, they are often obstructed, poorly marked, or inaccessible during emergencies, putting lives at risk.

Heat stress is another pervasive problem exacerbated by Cambodia's tropical climate and inadequate factory ventilation. Workers frequently describe sweltering conditions, with temperatures soaring inside poorly designed buildings, often made of tin or lacking sufficient airflow. This not only causes discomfort but also contributes to health issues such as dizziness, dehydration, and, in extreme cases, mass fainting incidents that have plagued the industry for years. Despite efforts by the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training and programs like Better

Factories Cambodia (BFC) to address these incidents, the root causes persist, including overwork and malnutrition linked to low wages.

III. Worker Experiences and Emerging Issues:

From the factory floor, our members report a range of OSH-related struggles. Long working hours, often extending into mandatory overtime, leave workers physically exhausted, increasing the likelihood of accidents. The pressure to meet high production targets means that complaints about unsafe machinery or environmental conditions are frequently ignored. Women, who make up nearly 80% of the workforce, face additional challenges, including inadequate facilities such as distance or insufficient restrooms, which impact their health and dignity during long shifts. For pregnant workers, the lack of accommodations or protections heightens risks, with some reporting demotions or dismissals when their conditions become visible.

IV. Our Call to Action:

The current state of OSH in Cambodia's garment factories reflects a broader power imbalance. International brands and factory owners' profits are prioritized over workers' health and safety. We demand more vigorous enforcement of existing laws, including regular inspections and meaningful penalties for violations. Factories must install proper ventilation systems, ensure consistent access to PPE, and maintain safe machinery. Heat stress must be addressed through building code reforms and worker education on climate impacts. Above all, C.CAWDU call for a living wage, as low pay forces workers to skip meals or overwork, directly undermining their health.

C.CAWDU also urge global brands sourcing from Cambodia to take responsibility. Their commitments to ethical supply chains ring hollow when workers faint from exhaustion or sew without proper safeguards. C.CAWDU pushes for factory-level OSH committees with absolute authority through collective bargaining, where workers' voices shape safety policies. Programs like BFC can support these efforts only if they prioritize transparency and worker empowerment over factory-friendly reporting. The garment sector can thrive without sacrificing our members' well-being, but it requires a united push from unions, workers, and allies worldwide to make safety a non-negotiable priority.

V. Training Activity on Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in Cambodia's Garment Factories:

As part of our ongoing commitment to improving Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) standards in Cambodia's garment factories, the Cambodian Confederation of Apparel Workers Democratic Union (C.CAWDU) organized a training session on February 2, 2025. This initiative aimed to empower workers and trade union leaders with the knowledge and tools to advocate for safer workplaces. The garment sector, a cornerstone of Cambodia's economy, employs hundreds of thousands of workers; OSH remains a critical concern due to persistent issues like poor ventilation, unsafe machinery, and inadequate protective measures. Through this training, we sought to address these challenges by equipping our members with essential OSH awareness.

➤ Training Overview and Participant Engagement:

The training session was attended by 26 participants, including four women, reflecting the gender dynamics of the industry, where women form the majority of the workforce. Of the attendees, 3 were project staff. At the same time, 23 were trade union leaders and workers representing six factories: Outdoor Gear (Cambodia) Co., Ltd, BESWIN FASHION (Cambodia) Co., Ltd, TARAL INTERNATIONAL CO., LTD, XO TEX INDUSTRIAL, Hongs One (Cambodia) Garment, and Leading Star (Cambodia) Garment Co., Ltd. These factories are key

players in Cambodia's garment production, supplying global brands, yet many struggle with OSH compliance, making such training vital for worker safety.

A pre-test was conducted at the start of the session to gauge the participants' baseline knowledge. The results revealed a significant gap in OSH awareness: only 3 out of the 26 participants demonstrated a solid understanding of OSH principles, 19 had some knowledge, and one had never heard of OSH before. These findings underscore the urgent need for education in this area, as many workers remain unaware of their rights to a safe working environment or the specific hazards they face daily, such as chemical exposure, heat stress, and machinery-related injuries. The training aimed to bridge this gap by providing practical insights and fostering a culture of safety advocacy among workers and union leaders among employers.



➤ **Key Discussions and OSH Insights:**

The session was facilitated by a main trainer invited by Mr. Seang Yot, the legal manager, who played a pivotal role in organizing the event. Mr. Yot opened the training by posing two critical questions to the group: What is Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)? and What is an OSH policy? These questions set the tone for an interactive and informative session, encouraging participants to reflect on their workplace conditions and the importance of safety standards.

The trainer provided a clear and comprehensive explanation, defining OSH as protecting workers' safety, health, and well-being in the workplace. They emphasized that OSH involves identifying and eliminating factors that can cause injuries or adverse effects on workers' health. For example, this could mean addressing risks like needle injuries from sewing machines, dust-related respiratory issues, or heat stress due to poor ventilation in garment factories. The trainer stressed that factories must take concrete measures to minimize risks if a hazard cannot be fully eliminated, such as using chemicals in fabric dyeing. This could include providing personal protective equipment (PPE) like masks and gloves, ensuring proper chemical storage, or installing better ventilation systems to reduce exposure.

The discussion on OSH policies further highlighted the need for factories to establish formal guidelines prioritizing worker safety. An effective OSH policy, the trainer explained, should outline clear responsibilities for employers, provide regular safety training, and ensure access to emergency resources like fire exits and first aid kits. Participants were encouraged to advocate for such policies in their factories, with C.CAWDU pledging to support them through collective bargaining and dialogue with factory management. The session also covered practical steps workers can take, such as reporting unsafe conditions to union representatives and participating in factory-level OSH committees to ensure their voices are heard.



After the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) training session, the trainer conducted a post-test to evaluate the participants' progress in understanding OSH principles. This step was critical to measure the effectiveness of the training and to determine how much knowledge the 23 participants, comprising trade union leaders, workers, and project staff from seven garment factories, had gained. The post-test results were encouraging, reflecting a significant improvement in awareness about workplace safety and health standards. Through careful observation and analysis of the responses, it was found that 18 participants had increased their knowledge of OSH by an impressive 75%. This group demonstrated a strong grasp of key concepts, such as identifying workplace hazards like poor ventilation or unsafe machinery and understanding the importance of protective measures like personal protective equipment (PPE) and emergency protocols. Additionally, 5 participants showed a more moderate improvement, increasing their OSH knowledge by up to 25%. While this group made progress, their results suggest a need for further education to fully comprehend the complexities of OSH policies and their application in the garment factory setting. Overall, the post-test outcomes highlight the training's success in elevating OSH awareness, empowering workers to advocate for safer conditions, and underscoring the value of continued education efforts by C.CAWDU to ensure all workers are equipped to protect their health and safety in Cambodia's garment sector.

➤ **Impact and Next Steps:**

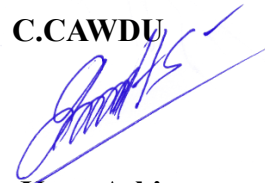
The training was a crucial step in raising OSH awareness among workers and trade union leaders, and many left the session with a clearer understanding of their rights and the steps they can take to improve workplace safety. For C.CAWDU, this event reinforced our commitment to empowering workers through education and advocacy. However, we recognize that awareness alone is not enough. Moving forward, C.CAWDU will continue to push for systemic changes, including stricter enforcement of OSH regulations by the government and greater accountability from factory owners and global brands. By equipping our members with knowledge and fostering a collective push for safer working conditions, C.CAWDU aims to transform Cambodia's garment sector into one where workers' health and safety are non-negotiable priorities.

Note: C.CAWDU ensures transparency in all expenditures. If required, we will scan and submit the financial documents detailing expenses for the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) training program to the Developing World Outreach Initiative (DWOI). This ensures accountability and supports DWOI's oversight of funds allocated for worker welfare initiatives.

Phnom Penh, Date 5th April 2025

The reporter by

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