

Treating Occupational Health as an Environmental Issue:
Immigrant Workers in the Rhode Island Jewelry Industry

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the factors that make the jewelry industry a potentially hazardous workplace for Rhode Island workers. Many factors contribute to health problems in the industry and it is not possible to isolate one party or one social influence as the main cause. Instead, it is useful to identify both a variety of players and social forces that contribute to unhealthy work conditions. Health and safety hazards are a symptom of systemic failures in the jewelry industry, environmental organizations, health and safety enforcement, immigration policies, and the organized labor movement. To curtail and prevent hazardous work situations, it is essential to address their social and economic causes as well as regulate specific substances in the jewelry-making process. Regardless of level of culpability, organizations that can influence occupational health must undertake the dual task of changing the nature of jewelry manufacturing and the way Rhode Island regulates it.