

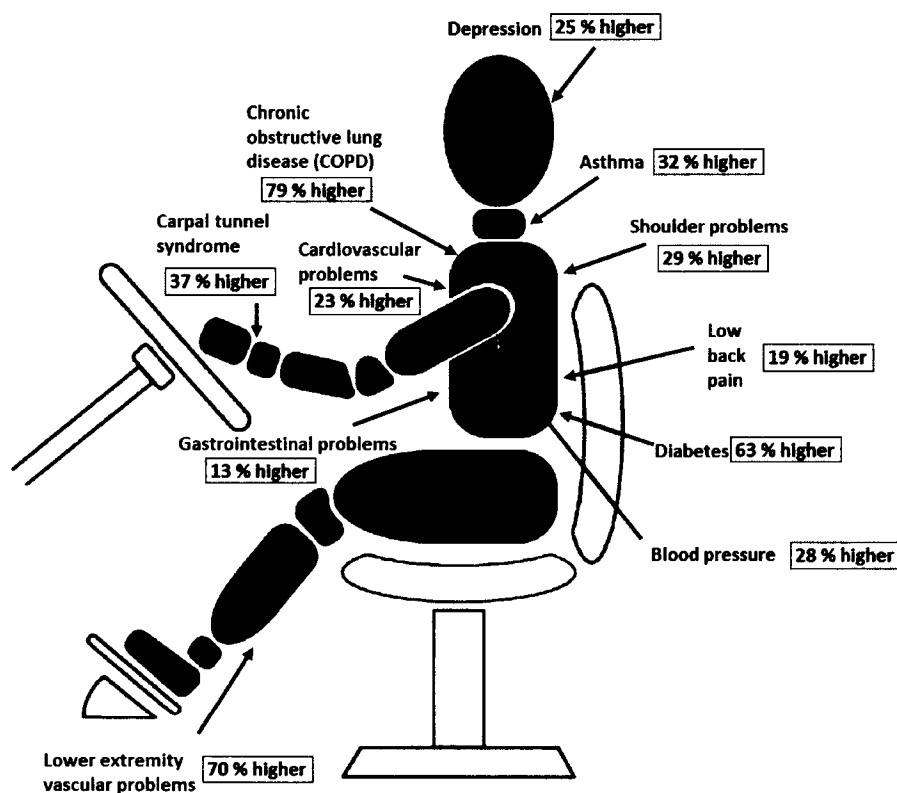


# HEALTH AND SAFETY IN TRANSIT OPERATIONS

## A FACTSHEET FOR LOCAL UNIONS

Bus operations work can be unhealthy and even dangerous. Transit workers have among the highest rates of all US workers for high blood pressure, diabetes, leg and back problems and depression. Work conditions that lead to these problems include (among many others) schedule stress, air quality, passenger assaults, vehicle seat and controls that do not fit the operators, potholes, extended sitting or standing, access to food and exposure to infectious diseases. All of the conditions can be improved, and some hazards could be eliminated. Until they are, transit workers remain at risk.

### Transit Health Concerns:



Bushnell, P. T., L. J., & Landen, D. (2011). Group medical claims as a source of information on worker health and potentially work-related diseases. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 53(12).

**Transit operations workers have the right to**

A clean, safe and healthy workplace

Bus cab, workstations, tools and equipment designed to reduce strain and pain

Training on safe work practices

Policies, equipment and environment that protect against assault and accidents

Noise at safe levels and a hearing conservation program if not

Access to restrooms

No retaliation, discipline, or threats for raising safety and health concerns

Treatment for work-related injuries and illnesses, and lost time pay (if in state law or contract)

**What can the Union do to win and enforce these rights?**

Employers are responsible for cleaning up the work environment and preventing problems. But it takes union action, using workers' knowledge and skills, to get things done.

The first step is for the Local Union to identify and document where problems are occurring. The next step is bringing the problems to management. Your Union may already participate in regular joint labor-management inspections of the workplace. This joint process should include reporting and addressing issues along bus and train lines and in stations as well as bus depots and crew areas. Weekly or monthly meetings help keep on top of work conditions. The inspection team or safety committee can investigate solutions and track whether things get better, stay the same or even continue to get worse. The Union health and safety team should have skills and knowledge to find the problems and confirm that management's responses are adequate. It is still the employers' job to get things done.

Members support the process by reporting problems and by sticking together to achieve safe and healthy conditions. Knowledge and training for Union officers and for members are important. Union strategies keep everyone involved – meetings, articles, buttons and communication. Local COSH groups (Committees on Occupational Safety and Health), occupational clinics, or Central Labor Councils can help with training, screening and health advice if needed. Some Local Unions have negotiated contract language establishing the right to participate in finding and fixing hazards, without retaliation.

The International Union can provide training to develop local skills on safety committees, building internal Union strength, contract language and specific hazards.

**What are the obstacles?**

- Employers may not want to spend the time and money needed to keep all workers safe.
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations only cover public sector workers in 25 states, so enforcement may be difficult.
- Local Unions may not yet have the knowledge, skills or time to tackle all concerns.

**The Union-wide Effort**

The people who do the work are in the best position to find out what is wrong and push for solutions. ATU and TWU are working together on health and safety issues for transit workers across the US and Canada. Current targets include restroom access and operator assaults. For assistance with training, strategizing, coalition-building, collective bargaining, and data collection, contact the International Union.