

Unsafe & Unprotected:

How Baltimore is Failing to Protect Worker Safety & Health



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I. Introduction

After several ongoing violations issued by Maryland Occupational Safety and Health (MOSH), and injuries and fatalities on the job, this report examines working conditions in the City of Baltimore. The objective of this report is to consolidate issues such as safety and health hazards that employees face each day on the job. Through the City Union of Baltimore (CUB), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the Occupational Health Internship Program (OHIP), accessing worker health and safety throughout the city of Baltimore was facilitated. Our demographics included workers from all areas of Baltimore, including traffic light installers, city school employees, meter technicians, Department of Transportation employees, Department of Health Employees, Housing Authority Inspectors, and Traffic Crossing Guards.

Baltimore City has taken little care or consideration for the health and safety of its workers. In the last 10 years, MOSH has issued 336 violations during 95 inspections within the city of Baltimore, most of which were initiated through complaints. Even more alarming, there have been four fatalities and six reported serious injuries and incidents. Unfortunately, workers are dying on the job and the problem within Baltimore is a lack of proactivity to prevent these incidents. Furthermore, workers have expressed a vital need for better training programs, distribution of tools, personal protection equipment, and appropriate equipment for their jobs. Many of these workers mentioned that they enjoy their jobs, and only wish to feel safe performing their daily duties. The issues Baltimore city workers face come directly from management that neglect the safety and health of their employees and oftentimes bully them. The toxic environment within these workplaces does not make the job easier for city employees.

To solve these issues, Baltimore city needs to focus on worker health and safety, providing proper training and equipment to better perform their jobs. The jobs that were analyzed throughout this summer include a variety of trade jobs and even healthcare and school system employees, all of which are necessary to creating a functional and thriving city. Workers should not fear going into work each day and deplorable conditions within the workplace should not be normalized.

II. Data and Methods

During the period (June-August 2022) we explored working conditions in the City of Baltimore, Maryland. During our research we primarily focused on the Department of Transportation, the Department of Public Works, and the Department of Public Health in Baltimore. We used a variety of methods to collect data including written survey, a review of the Maryland Occupational Safety and Health Commission records, one-on-one interviews with Baltimore City workers, and job site inspection(s). We have masked the identity of the workers we spoke to in this report due to a fear of retaliation and job loss from management. We were accompanied by the City Union of Baltimore during this project.

III. MOSH Inspection Data

During the last ten years workplaces operated by the City of Baltimore have been inspected by MOSH on 95 occasions.¹ Nearly half of these inspections occurred because of an employee complaint, 47 total.¹ MOSH conducted the additional 48 inspections for several reasons such as follow-up inspections, inspections after a fatality or catastrophic event, and or a programed inspection.¹

As a result, MOSH has issued an alarming 336 violations between the 95 inspections.¹ An average of about 3.6 violations were issued per inspection over the past ten years. While any type of violation is cause for concern, there are certain violations that have been repeated more than others.

Baltimore City has consistently failed to comply with MOSH's electrical, fire protection, and hazard communication standards on 37 occasions during the ten-year period studied.² Ensuring that workers and the public are protected from electrocution, fire, and hazardous chemicals in city operated buildings and facilities is a basic tenant of life safety, however Baltimore City struggles to meet its mandate.

2947 Washington Boulevard

The worksite located at 2974 Washington Boulevard is a base for the Water and Sewer Line and Related Structures Construction department. The worksite was inspected during 2019 where MOSH issued a total of seventeen violations after the inspection, exceeding the number of violations issued per inspection by five times the average.³

MOSH issued violations for items such as walking-working surface conditions, unsafe ladders, fall protection, improper use of cranes, and electrical wiring. Not only has this location received many citations, but it has also been recently inspected again in June of 2022.⁴ While no citations have been issued after the June 2022 inspection, the case is open and MOSH has said that the inspection will most likely result in five repeated violations on the same items the city failed to abate during the 2019 inspection.⁴

2601 Falls Road

The worksite located at 2601 Falls Road is a base for the Department of Transportation Highway Maintenance Division. This worksite had previously been inspected by MOSH on three different

¹ See Table 1. OSHA Enforcement Inspection Data Results in 2012-2022.

² See Table 2. Top 10 Most Cited Violations in Baltimore 2012-2022.

³ *Inspection Data from 2947 Washington Boulevard, Occupational Safety and Health Administration Establishment Search, Baltimore Maryland, 2019.* United States Department Labor, <https://bit.ly/3P83NrH>

⁴ *Inspection Data from 2947 Washington Boulevard, Occupational Safety and Health Administration Establishment Search, Baltimore Maryland, 2022.* United States Department Labor, <https://bit.ly/3BTDqme>

occasions. The first in 2015 which resulted in four violations, the next inspection was in 2019 resulting in four more different violations, and finally, the most recent inspection occurred in 2021 resulting in seven violations.⁵

The conditions at this location are deplorable. The work areas are not properly illuminated and presumed asbestos ceilings are collapsing directly above employee work areas. Break rooms are unsanitary, and evidence of a pest infestation is visible. To make matter worse, the roof is collapsing, and structural walls leaning, indicating the potential for collapse.

On-the-job injuries are also of concern at this location. There are a total of 60 employees at Falls Road. During 2021, 19 workers reported significant workplace injuries that resulted in days away from work at a total of 32 percent of its workforce.⁶

Fatalities

Baltimore City has an egregious record when it comes to protecting the lives of its workforce. In total, there have been four reported fatalities of public sector workers in Baltimore City from 2012-2022.⁷ Out of the four inspections resulting from a fatality, fourteen violations were issued by MOSH.⁷

During August of 2021, MOSH conducted an inspection because of the death of an employee that worked in garbage collection.⁷ This employee was riding on the back of the garbage truck, fell off and then struck their head on the side of a curb. A violation was issued to Baltimore City because they failed to provide the employee with a place of employment that is safe and healthful and free from each recognized hazard that was likely to cause death or serious physical harm.⁸ Improper safety practices placed the employee in harms way that unfortunately resulted in a preventable death.

The tragic death of Trina Cunningham in 2019 found a total of thirteen violations at the Patapsco Wastewater Treatment Plant where she worked for more than twenty years.⁹ Baltimore City was cited for placing her in a workplace environment was not safe, healthful, or free from recognized hazards.¹⁰ In addition, other violations the city was also cited for failure to inspect/repair walking-working surfaces, proper guardrail systems, crane inspection and maintenance, proper electrical installations, and inspection and maintenance of ladders.¹⁰ Shortly following the death of Trina Cunningham, another water treatment facility, the Back River Wastewater Treatment was inspected due to a worker complaint in September of 2020 and was then found to have a

⁵ *Inspection Data from 2601 Falls Road, Occupational Safety and Health Administration Establishment Search, Baltimore Maryland, 2015-2022.* United States Department Labor, <https://bit.ly/3bKme81>

⁶ OSHA's Form 300A, Summary of Work-Related Injuries and Illnesses, 2021, 2601 Falls Road Baltimore, MD 21202.

⁷ See Table 3. Fatalities in Baltimore 2012-2022.

⁸ *Inspection Data from 1100 Block W. Baltimore Street, Occupational Safety and Health Administration Establishment Search, Baltimore Maryland, 2020.* United States Department Labor, <https://bit.ly/3bGvJVU>

⁹ Barry Simms, "Multimillion-Dollar Lawsuit Seeks to Hold City Accountable in Trina Cunningham's Death," WBAL (WBAL, November 17, 2021), <https://bit.ly/3QufPg8>

¹⁰ *Inspection Data from 3501 Asiatic Avenue, Occupational Safety and Health Administration Establishment Search, Baltimore Maryland, 2019.* United States Department Labor, <https://bit.ly/3JDx789>

total of 25 violations, many of them with similar violations to the inspection done in 2019 after the fatality.¹¹

Incidents and Injuries

In the past ten years, MOSH has inspected six locations as a result of workplace injury.¹² There are many more accidents and injuries that are either left unreported or did not result in an inspection. The workplace incident that occurred in 2016, boasted a total of six violations reported.¹² While the nature of the injury was not specified, the six violations cited indicate there were multiple issues with excavation operations and portable ladders.

Another incident of interest occurred in 2018. Here, an employee lost part of two fingers when an unsecured hatch fell and struck their hand. MOSH issued zero violations as a result of this injury.¹²

IV. City Union of Baltimore Health and Safety Survey

A survey on the health and safety of City Union of Baltimore members was distributed from June 1, 2022, through August 5, 2022 and reached a total of 842 people. There was a total of 146 responses from CUB members. Respondents had the ability to stay completely anonymous when answering the survey. The survey allowed for workers to pick the top three work-related health and safety problems, as well as an area that allowed for a typed response. Many employees cited communicable and infectious diseases, workplace stress, and indoor air quality as top concerns. When asked if any health and safety training provided by an employer had ever been attended, 58% responded no. Many respondents replied with concerns about workplace violence with citizens as well as tensions with upper management. Issues, where workers are not given proper safety gear or training, are a common occurrence.

V. Worker Testimonials

A major part of the research was to make note of testimonials from workers themselves. No one knows what hazards workers face on the job better than the workers themselves. The following narratives come from interviews conducted one on one and in confidentiality to protect the identity of workers due to the fear of retaliation and loss of employment. All employees interviewed are public sector workers that contribute directly to the city.

Meter Technician III

Within the city of Baltimore, Meter Technicians oversee the reading of meters, but also carry on various responsibilities like installation, maintenance, and other services for the public to have access to water. An integral part of the job is mobile work where Meter Technicians venture out into the city and check if wiring is correctly done, usually climbing into confined spaces from waist to 80 ft deep. After many years on the job, a Meter Technician III disclosed that they could

¹¹ *Inspection Data from 8201 Eastern Ave., Occupational Safety and Health Administration Establishment Search, Baltimore Maryland, 2020.* United States Department Labor, <https://bit.ly/3SMtYHB>

¹² See Table 4. Incidents & Injuries in Baltimore 2012-2022.

only remember attending confined spaces training on a single occasion, for about an hour. In addition, Meter Technicians do not carry permits or mandatory certifications to enter these confined spaces within the city. Sometimes, due to other responsibilities that their partner may encounter on the ground, there are gaps in time when a Meter Technician is in the confined space reading the meter unsupervised. Furthermore, there are no atmosphere checks, ventilators, or respirators provided for these workers. Rescue tripods, fall protection harnesses, barrier gates, ventilation systems, are the equipment that the technicians mentioned would make the job safer but do not have access to. There have also been instances of racism and sexual harassment that have not been properly addressed within the workplace.

Construction Building Inspector II

Construction Building Inspectors oversee 3rd party contractors conducting large improvements. They are onsite representatives for the city and make sure that they are complying with the contract and doing everything safely on the job site. During their many years working for the city of Baltimore, this Construction Building Inspector II shined light on various serious issues within the profession—most of the issues pertained to the city not doing the checkups required on construction projects. The Construction Building Inspector used asbestos and lead paint as an example, where the use of these hazardous materials was not addressed with proper training. Respirators are not available for workers, and there is not the necessary respirator protection program or hazard communication plan being followed.

Supervisor for Facilities Department for City Schools

Some typical duties that fall under this Supervisor include handling finances and budget, purchasing orders, and meetings with vendors, while also performing job duties such as plumbing, electrical, and concrete work. The Supervisor gave insight into the more industrial side of their job which is managing the shop-area and taking care of more maintenance-related needs. In terms of equipment, the shop has a forklift and scissor lift; however, there has been no proper training to safely use this machinery. In terms of needs, the supervisor mentioned that safety equipment and hand tools are scarce. The need for better training and distribution of proper equipment results in a variety of hazards. Some of the main hazards this supervisor pointed out were cluttered spaces and unsanitary areas. This results in slips and falls due to various hazardous things getting in the way. Within that area, workers have suffered back strains and have been denied workers' compensation, and others have fallen off ladders. The supervisor also described the job site by mentioning rat infestations, lead paint in the hallway, issues with heating, and electrical wiring not in compliance with the building code.

Traffic Guard Crossing Supervisor

Traffic Crossing Guard Supervisors have similar duties as law enforcement officers. They issue tickets and manage traffic throughout Baltimore. However, they do not have the same credentials or immunity as law enforcement officers. Unfortunately, these workers face violence and attacks on-the-job, some of which have made the news. There was an instance where a liquid was thrown at a traffic crossing guard's face. Employees oftentimes feel threatened on the job but

there is no training on how to deal with different workplace violence issues. In addition, the traffic crossing guard supervisor strongly believes that radios should be required to better communicate when a violent incident occurs. Other hazards include extreme heat and cold temperatures and no protective gear to protect them from these elements.

Vehicle Processor

Vehicle processors process vehicles from all of areas in Baltimore streets. They work closely with police reports and make sure everything that is normally in a vehicle is there, as well as check for valuables, and store/document the information captured in the inspection of the vehicle. Safety and health training does exist for these employees. On-the-job training is minimal and is delivered by existing employees; no training plan exists. Employees are provided with city uniforms and work boots but are not given gloves, masks, respirators, or safety glasses. The biggest hazards come from within the cars themselves, where employees have encountered drugs, needles, dead bodies, and flammable objects. Without the minimum personal protection equipment needed, like gloves, respirators, and safety goggles, employees are exposed to a plethora of hazards, such as being punctured by a used needle. There is no safety plan in place to prevent these incidents from happening or to mitigate damage when they occur.

Housing Inspector and Code Enforcement Officer

Typically, a Housing Inspector is only meant to deal with sanitation and structural complaints. They are a ticket agency and write violations. However, in the city of Baltimore, Housing Inspectors deal with electrical and HVAC systems, animal control, overflowing trash, and absolute sanitation. It is oftentimes described as a “short-staffed, stressful, and frustrating” job by the employees themselves. The Housing Inspector mentioned that there is outdated, “case by case” training going on due to the amplified demands and expectations of the job. There is a lack of communication, and an understanding from management’s perspective that mistakes are “bound to happen” in the spontaneity and danger of the job. Some hazards that these employees face are from the use of personal vehicles out in the field, walking down alleyways in questionable neighborhoods, and exposure to drugs. Employees have been carjacked, mauled by dogs, robbed, harassed, and threatened. The only defense mechanism that employees have is city issued pepper spray. The pepper spray was issued without proper training on how to use it and no replacement once it expires. There is a need for tasers, two-way phones, and handheld sets to be safer and more in contact with others in case of an emergency.

VI. Workplace Inspections

Women, Infant & Children (WIC)

The City Union of Baltimore was able to visit five WIC locations throughout the city during July 2022. These locations had several maintenance issues including electrical, damaged ceilings, and fire extinguishers that were out of compliance. Of significant concern was the fact that these health facilities could not produce a bloodborne pathogen hazard control plan, even though their employees work directly with human blood and have the potential to be exposed to human blood and other potentially infectious materials. During the inspection, management informed CUB

that they do not have a written hazard communication program and eliminated all the necessary safety data sheets for chemicals that are being used in all WIC locations. Management could not produce OSHA's Forms 300, 300A, or 301 (injury and illness recordkeeping) when requested. At least one of the WIC locations had faulty door locks making it difficult to escape the premises in the event of a fire. CUB also requested employee training records from management, and none could be produced.

Meter Shop

The City Union of Baltimore had the opportunity to be in the field with Meter Technicians as they did their rounds in the city on six occasions during July 2022. During these visits, there were several noticeable safety hazards that meter technicians encounter daily. To begin, the ladders that these employees are issued are not weight-appropriate, so they are unable to use them and oftentimes just climb into the manholes and climb back out, with many employees suffering back, shoulder, and wrist problems. Retrieval lines, harnesses, and tripod rescue systems would be the standard in these situations. Employees have resorted to building their own tools out of everyday materials to make the jobs easier and safer. Employees mentioned that the main issue is management not being accountable for the safety of employees, insisting that better training is needed to make them feel safer on-the-job. To make matters worse, the workers were not aware of a written confined space entry program policy or a permit system for confined space entry when MOSH requires one.

Department of City Schools

This location serves more as a warehouse for employees that do maintenance, including electricity, plumbing, and other trades. The conditions of the building are deplorable, where extremely old machinery has not been cleared out, pest infestations are manifesting, and an extremely cluttered workplace area exists. This is problematic because, in the case of a fire, the old machinery and improperly stored chemicals would burn the building down in seconds, and employees would be unable to escape due to the cluttered work areas. The place is a ticking bomb. There are no up-to-date fire extinguishers or visible sprinklers. In addition, the ventilation is faulty resulting in poor indoor air quality.

VII. Recommendations

It is Baltimore City's duty to keep its employees safe from any preventable worksite health and safety hazard. Through our investigation, it is apparent that Baltimore has zero regard for worker safety until they are forced to after a fatality or catastrophe. First and foremost, employees need to be provided with a safe working environment, proper safety equipment to complete their jobs, and thorough safety training on how to use the equipment. The city has failed on multiple occasions to follow fundamental MOSH regulations.

In the short term we recommend that Baltimore City immediately:

- Involve workers in all matters of safety and health;
- Prioritize building a health and safety committee;

- Empower employees through safety education and training;
- Encourage all employees to unite and exercise their rights as workers; and
- Implement confined space, electrical, fire, bloodborne pathogen, and hazard communication programs where necessary.

VIII. Conclusion

Baltimore City needs to proactively take action to support the workers that help the city run. Without the support of the local workers in Baltimore City, workplace conditions will continue to decline. It is only a matter of time until the next worker is injured or killed on the job. The path to worker health and safety in Baltimore is not a sprint, it's a marathon. Change requires support from workers in all departments so Baltimore City can be held accountable for its workers' safety. Employees and employers alike have had to make do with the conditions that were provided to them. It is unacceptable to continue to have workers in these dangerous conditions. No local government should be able to get away with treating their workers this way. City workers of Baltimore need to unite to empower themselves and others to hold the city accountable for maintaining a healthy and safe workplace.

IX. Appendix A: Baltimore Inspection Data 2012-2022

Table 1. OSHA Enforcement Inspection Data Results in 2012-2022

City	Violations	Total Inspections	Fatalities	Accidents/Cat	Complaints	Planned	Referral	Follow-Up	Unprogrammed
Baltimore, MD	336	95	4	6	47	33	4	1	0

Table 2. Top 10 Most Cited Violations in Baltimore 2012-2022

Baltimore City Violations	# of Same Violations	Violation Category
1910.305(B)(1)(ii)	10	Electrical - Conductors entering Cabinets, boxes, and fittings
1910.157(E)(3)	10	Fire Protection - inspection maintenance and testing of portable fire extinguishers
1910.157(E)(2)	9	Fire Protection - inspection maintenance and testing of portable fire extinguishers
1910.1200(H)(1)	8	Hazard Communication - Toxic and Hazardous substances employee communication and training
1910.303(B)(2)	8	General - Examination, Installation, and Use of Equipment
1904.4(A)	8	Recording and Reporting Occupational Injuries and Illness
1910.022(A)(1)	6	Walking-Working surfaces - Surface conditions.
1910.022(D)(1)	6	Walking-Working surfaces - Inspection, maintenance, and repair.
1910.151(C)	6	Medical Services and First Aid
1910.303(G)(1)(ii)	6	General - 600 Volts, nominal, or less. This paragraph applies to electric equipment operating at 600 volts, nominal, or less to the ground.

Table 3. Fatalities in Baltimore 2012-2022

Date	Establishment Name	Address	# of Violations	Type of Fatality
08/25/2020	Mayor & City Council of Baltimore	1100 Block W. Baltimore Street	1	Fatality- Employee fell off of a garbage truck
06/03/2019	Mayor & City Council of Baltimore	3501 Asiatic Avenue	13	Fatality- Employee fell through grates
03/08/2016	Mayor & City Council of Baltimore	6100 Quarantine	0	Fatality/Catastrophe
11/13/2014	Baltimore City Fire Department	710 E. North Ave	0	Fatality- Inhaled smoke after a fire

Table 4. Incidents & Injuries in Baltimore 2012-2022

Date	Establishment	Address	# of Violations	Type of Incident
01/24/2022	Mayor & City Council of Baltimore	205 S Stricker Street	0	Accident; Fatality/Catastrophe
04/11/2018	Housing Authority Of Baltimore City	1600 - 1628 Lorman Court	0	Injury- A hatch amputated an employee's fingers
09/04/2016	Baltimore Department Of Public Works	5969 Schering Road	6	Accident
01/08/2015	Housing Authority Of Baltimore City	522 West Hoffman Street	0	Accident

02/19/2013	Mayor & City Council of Baltimore	200 Rosewood Lane	1	Accident
2/15/2013	University Of Maryland Baltimore Police Force	200 Rosewood Lane	0	Accident

X. Appendix B: Images from Site Visits



621 N Eden St, Baltimore, MD 21205

WIC location: presumed lead paint peeling, debris, lack of lead and asbestos records.



621 N Eden St, Baltimore, MD 21205

WIC location: patient room with overloaded outlets, trip and fire hazards.



**663 West Saratoga
Metershop: Gloves that rip, no confined space entry permit**



**Inner Harbor
Metershop: Crawling under deck to get to meter.**



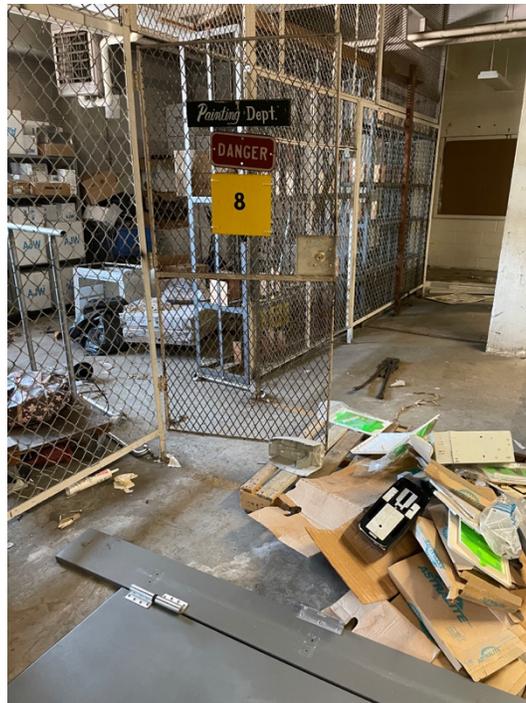
Inner Harbor
Metershop: No entry permits, no atmosphere tests, no fall protection.



663 West Saratoga
Metershop: Employees creating own tools out of bamboo and duct tape.



1230 E 20th Street Baltimore MD, 21218
Department of Education: Bathroom containing clutter and vermin nests throughout.



1230 E 20th Street Baltimore MD, 21218
Department of Education: Clutter and lack of sprinklers, flammable materials.



2601 Falls Road
DOT: Presumed asbestos ceiling tiles falling onto employee desks.



2601 Falls Road
DOT: Flooding in ceiling and building is collapsing.

