

Press Release:  
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Study Finds 1 out of 2 Workers Making Below Minimum Wage in San Francisco  
Chinatown Restaurants:  
Millions Lost to the Local Economy Every Year

Friday, September 17th, San Francisco, CA - Chinatown restaurant workers in conjunction with the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA), the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH), and key research partners will release a study that exposes sweatshop conditions in restaurant workers in the popular tourist district Chinatown. This groundbreaking report examines health and working conditions in Chinatown restaurants, with over 400 workers interviewed by their peers, and lays out a vision for improving working conditions for a healthy Chinatown.

Key findings about the working conditions include:  
1 out of 2 workers (50%) receive less than minimum wage  
1 out of 5 workers (20%) work more than 60 hours a week  
Nearly half (48%) of workers have experienced burn injury  
Only 3% of workers have employer provided health care  
95% do not receive a living wage

Through this important study, Check, Please! Health and Working Conditions in San Francisco Chinatown Restaurants, Chinatown workers are exposing the sweatshop working conditions that they must endure. While thousands of locals and tourists enjoy Chinatown each day, workers are struggling to make ends meet and provide for their families. Many workers and their families are forced to live in Single Room Occupancy (SRO) spaces in Chinatown that average about 80 square feet.

This study finds that labor law violations hurt the local economy. Out of the estimated \$70.8 million economy (taxable sales) in Chinatown's restaurant industry, workers lose over \$8 million dollars a year due to labor law violations. For a kitchen worker, this is approximately \$6,000 per year and 30% of their annual income.

"I worked in a Chinatown restaurant for seven years. It's a hard job. I worked 6 days a week and got paid \$900 a month, less than minimum wage. I stayed there because I have two kids and we all need to survive," a worker stated.

Other studies show this is a national epidemic. The National Employment Law Project's (NELP) 2010 national study Broken Laws, Unprotected Workers shows that wage theft and employment law violations in low wage labor markets are widespread in major US cities. Nationally, two thirds of low wage workers are denied full pay and 26% workers are paid below minimum wage.

Meredith Minkler DrPH, MPH, Professor of Public Health at UC Berkeley and

Principal Investigator of the study said, "This is a ground breaking study in its combination of sound scientific methods, high level community partnership, and the translation of findings in ways that can result in real change. By also including detailed health department observations in over 100 Chinatown restaurants, this study produced dramatic findings about the health and safety of workers that calls out for redress."

"These finding are sobering and unacceptable. We understand these problems will take time to solve and we are committed to working with the community to develop solutions. With the economy as tough as it is, we cannot afford to ignore the dangers of rampant wage theft and a situation where 95% of workers earn below a living wage," observed SF Supervisor Eric Mar.

This study has already prompted action by SFDPH. Director of Occupational and Environmental Health, Rajiv Bhatia, MD, MPH, confirmed, "The study findings demonstrate that unhealthy workplaces and labor violations are a hazard for worker and public health. The health department cannot stand on the sidelines. We've decided to use our regulatory tools to ensure that all businesses we permit are achieving a healthy standard for workers. Although our pilot projects have highlighted opportunities for improved compliance, there is much much more to do."

After the results of the survey findings, workers discussed solutions to improve workers health and working conditions.

The report will outline the key recommendations:

§ Convene community stakeholder roundtables - After initiating dialogues with workers, community members, community leaders, and businesses in Chinatown, CPA will continue by convening community roundtable meetings the next couple of months.

§ Strengthen enforcement of labor and health and safety laws - San Francisco should shift enforcement strategy as other states like New York have taken steps to be proactive and strategic to hold employers accountable and partner with workers and community organizations to develop new enforcement mechanisms. San Francisco should move in this direction.

§ Significantly invest in Chinatown's economic development - Chinatown needs diversified economic development with strong labor standards, small business stabilization and technical assistance. This needs to be accompanied with promoting responsible employers.

1. Creation of a city guide to good businesses that pay living wage and provide health and safety protections
2. City funded economic development projects should mandate living wage to support responsible businesses

§ Address high unemployment through job creation and training programs.

Chinatown worker Lin Gan stated, "Many people say we cannot change Chinatown, but I am proof that it is possible. These problems infect all of Chinatown - like the New On Sang poultry market where I worked for \$6 an

hour and wasn't paid for over 2 months. Many people said, New On Sang will never pay you back--but by organizing and uniting with community, we got our back wages. In the same way, we believe that the community can come together to find solutions to the problems in Chinatown restaurant industries."

Check, Please! was funded by the National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety (NIOHS), The California Endowment and The California Wellness Foundation. The research was designed and conducted by restaurant workers in partnership with researchers from UC Berkeley and UCSF San Francisco, UC Berkeley Labor Occupational Health Program, and the San Francisco Department of Public Health, with writing support from the DataCenter. The full report and executive summary will be available online at [www.cpasf.org](http://www.cpasf.org).

Chinese Progressive Association educates and organizes the low income and working-class immigrant Chinese community in San Francisco. Since 2004, CPA has helped restaurant and food industry workers recover over \$725,000 in unpaid wages and minimum wage violations. CPA also played a leadership role in passing Prop L - SF Minimum Wage Ordinance, Prop F - SF Paid Sick Leave Ordinance and the SF Second Hand Smoke Ordinance.

Where and When:

11:30 am, Friday, September 17, 2010  
at the Chinese Progressive Association  
1042 Grant Ave. 4th Floor  
San Francisco's Chinatown, CA 94133  
Light refreshments provided

Photo Opportunities and Visuals: Visuals of the report and large signs of the report cover and policy recommendations, a panel of worker, community leaders and board of supervisors; over 100 workers, community leaders and supporters will attend.

Interviews in Chinese, English and Spanish available.