

How Do Workers Make Complaints About Working Conditions? Findings from the 2008 Unregulated Work Survey

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The [2008 Unregulated Work Survey](#) consists of a statistically-reliable sample of 4,387 workers in low-wage industries in America's three largest cities: Chicago, Los Angeles and New York City. The survey included in-depth questions about how often workers make complaints about their working conditions; to whom they make those complaints; and how their employers responded, including retaliatory actions.¹ Table 1 shows that, of workers making a complaint about their working conditions, the large majority (95.5 percent) made the complaint (a) orally and (b) internally, to a supervisor or employer. Only small fractions filed an official complaint with a government agency, or asked a representative to complain to the employer on their behalf.

Table 1. Methods of Making Complaints About Working Conditions

Answers in response to the question: "How did you make this complaint?"	Percent of workers*
1. Discussed the problem with supervisor or employer	95.5%
2. Filed a complaint with an agency, like the Department of Labor or OSHA	1.2%
3. Asked a lawyer, union representative, worker center, or other community group to complain to employer on your behalf	2.0%
4. Worker made oral complaint to supervisor (#1 above), combined with at least one other form of complaint (#2 or #3 above)	1.3%

Source: Authors' analysis of 2008 Unregulated Work Survey

* Calculated as percent of workers who made at least one complaint in the last three years; answers are in reference to the most recent complaint made.

¹ For more information about the survey, see: Michael Spiller, Annette Bernhardt, Jason Perelshteyn and Douglas Heckathorn. 2010. "Sampling, Fielding, and Estimation in the 2008 Unregulated Work Survey." Technical Report, Center for the Study of Economy and Society, Cornell University, February 2010.