



**At Risk in the  
Restaurant:  
Perilous health and safety conditions in  
one of Koreatown's key industries**



A report prepared by the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance  
in association with Special Service for Groups

March 2007

# Acknowledgements

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**KIWA would like to thank the following foundations for their support:**

Asian Pacific Community Fund  
Diane Middleton Foundation  
Hill-Snowden Foundation  
Public Welfare Foundation  
Rosenberg Foundation  
The California Endowment  
Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock

**Survey creation & Data Analysis**

Eric Wat, Special Service for Groups

**Data Collection**

Jacinto Lopez  
Jung-Hee Lee  
Max Mariscal

**Report write-up**

Trisha Park  
Vy Nguyen

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# Executive Summary

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Korean restaurants are a major pillar of the Koreatown economy. There are over 500 Korean-owned restaurants in Koreatown, with approximately 6,000 Korean and Latino immigrant workers. But these restaurants are too often taking the economic “low road” by paying low wages, violating government regulations and not investing in their workforce. The industry’s high rate of wage and hour violations has already been well-documented, but another significant problem for the industry that needs attention is the poor state of occupational health and safety conditions

for workers, which in turn affect the quality of food and service that diners experience. Behind the cheery faces of the servers and the tasty dishes that are being served, Koreatown restaurants are worksites with a significant risk of hazards and injuries to their workers.

As Koreatown’s reputation continues to grow as a dining and entertainment center for both Korean American and mainstream crowds alike, we face the challenge to transform our local economy from an informal, “low road” operation into one that not only abides by the law but also builds a solid foundation for growth by investing in its workforce and ultimately delivering higher quality food and service to diners.

The restaurant industry in Koreatown employs a large number of the Korean low-wage work force in Los Angeles, a region home to the largest Korean American population outside of Korea. While there has been research conducted on health and safety conditions in mainstream restaurants, there is little data on the conditions specific to restaurants in an ethnic enclave industry and how the cuisine and techniques unique to that industry can present specific health and safety challenges. This report intends to provide employers, managers, workers, and government agencies with information on injuries suffered by Korean and Latino workers in the Koreatown restaurant industry. In addition to presenting research on the current conditions in Koreatown restaurants, we also offer recommendations for the community in promoting safe and healthy workplaces, and thereby also improving conditions for workers and strengthening the industry as a whole.

In 2006, the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA) conducted research on health and safety conditions for workers in Koreatown’s restaurant industry. This study is intended to educate the public about an important community issue. KIWA will also be using the findings from this report to create a training program on Koreatown restaurant health and safety for workers and managers/owners.

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### I. Methodology

Our findings are based on surveys of restaurant workers carried out between April 2006 and November 2006, resulting in a total sample of 91 workers from a variety of Korean-owned restaurants in Koreatown, Los Angeles. We surveyed workers from Korean tofu, noodle, BBQ, and sushi restaurants, as well as bar/restaurants, totaling approximately 50 different establishments. Our survey explored worker health conditions, the physically demanding nature of tasks, workplace practices such as safety training and safety equipment, and exposure to hazardous materials.

### II. Summary of Findings

Our research found that workplace conditions in local Koreatown restaurants pose a significant threat to the health of community members employed in the industry. This could pose serious consequences for the business owners as well, who would see their profit potential undermined by higher workers compensation premiums and an unhealthy and untrained workforce.

- **The Koreatown restaurant industry remains a largely unregulated industry that frequently violates health and safety laws as well as labor laws.**
  - Two-thirds of Koreatown restaurant workers surveyed work 40 hours or more per week, but only about 30% get paid over-time when they do so.
  - More than 60% of restaurant workers surveyed have worked more than 4 hours straight without a paid break.
  - Even though workplace injuries are typically prevalent in restaurants, less than 5% of the workers surveyed have ever applied for workers' compensation when injured on the job.
  
- **Workers surveyed are exposed to dangerous work environments.**
  - Both Korean and Latino workers overwhelmingly stated that their jobs require a high amount of repetitive work (96.6%), requires working fast (93.3%), and is physically demanding (88.8%).
  - Many respondents reported *moderate* or *severe* pains or discomfort in multiple body parts when performing the tasks at their daily work. Workers experienced the most pain in the lower back (58.3%), neck, shoulder and upper back (51.2%), legs, knees and feet (50%), wrists (48.7%), hands (44.3%), and elbows and forearms (40.5%).
  - In addition to their tasks, workers are often exposed to harmful materials at the workplace that make injuries or illness more likely, such as cleaning chemicals (34.9%), hot liquids or objects (42.5%), smoke in the kitchen and dining area (40.5%), and knives, cleavers and box cutters (43.9%).
  - Workers also find themselves in a work environment that makes injuries more likely. More than half of the respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they

are “often pressured, either physically or verbally, to work faster.” Almost half *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that “there are often no enough workers to handle all the work” (47.7%) and that they are “often required to work for long periods in uncomfortable positions” (47.6%). More than 1 in 4 respondents (28.0%) reported that they *never* or *rarely* have enough workspace.

- **The high risk environment in Koreatown restaurants contributes to incidents of workplace injuries and chronic health symptoms.**
  - Almost 2 out of 5 respondents reported having suffered a burn (38.5%) or a cut (38.2%) at work in the last 6 months. About 1 in 8 (12.8%) slipped or fell in the same time period.
  - In addition to accidents, many respondents also reported chronic health symptoms, such as fatigue (58.2%), headaches (45.1%), and leg cramps (37.4%).
  
- **Despite working with hazardous materials, many workers and employers do not take precautionary measures, and many employers do not provide workers with training to reduce the likelihood of injuries or illness.**
  - Almost two-thirds (65.8%) reported that they *never* or *rarely* wear gloves when washing dishes. Thirty percent reported that they do *not* have enough ventilation in their work area. Almost 1 in 5 respondents (21.4%) reported that they are *never* or *rarely* free of electrical cords, boxes or other storage.
  - Many of the workers also lacked some of the most basic equipment that can prevent workplace injuries. More than 1 in 5 respondents (21.4%) reported that they *never* or *rarely* have non-slip mats to cover the floor. Fourteen percent reported they *never* or *rarely* use potholders to hold something hot. More than half of the Latino respondents do *not* know where the first aid kit is.
  - A majority of the respondents reported they have *not* received any training regarding any aspect of workplace safety – chemical hazards (80.7%), preventing burns, cuts and falls (79.5%), emergency training, or what to do when someone else is injured (77.3%), job safety (75%), preventing back injuries/correct lifting (75.3%), food handling and safety (58.4%).
  
- **In spite of significant workplace health issues, most workers do not have health insurance and face other barriers to accessing medical care.**
  - An overwhelming majority of workers reported they do not have health insurance.
  - Besides lack of health insurance, there are other barriers for restaurant workers to seek medical help. Respondents reported that they did not have time (19.8%), couldn’t afford healthcare (18.7%), were inhibited by their immigration status (14.3%), did not think their health issue was important (11%), and did not know where to get help (9.9%).

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### III. Recommendations

Continuing “business as usual” in the Koreatown restaurant industry by failing to correct significant health and safety problems threatens the future vitality of the industry and the community as a whole, hurting workers, business owners and the Koreatown local economy. In order to make the necessary improvements, Koreatown restaurant workers, owners, customers and government agencies must work together to promote safe and healthy workplace practices in the Koreatown restaurant industry.

**1. Employers need to take responsibility for improving health and safety conditions.** Owners and managers have a responsibility to provide workers with health and safety trainings and safety equipment. At the very minimum, owners need to abide by state law around workplace health and safety standards.

**2. Workers need to learn how to protect themselves on the job.** Workers have a responsibility to know their health and safety rights and to protect their own health and safety at work by using the available safety equipment, and by participating in restaurant health and safety training programs when they are available.

**3. Diners need to make responsible choices** about the businesses they choose to dine at, and support those that abide by labor and health and safety regulations.

*In addition to the responsibilities of owners and managers, workers and diners, there are broader policies that we recommend:*

**4. Support worker organizations that improve conditions for workers.** The community should support workers’ efforts to organize themselves into community organizations, associations and/or unions that work to improve employment conditions that can result in a healthier business and a stronger local economy.

**5. Provide government agencies with adequate education and enforcement funds.** Government agencies such as CAL/OSHA should be provided with the resources to strengthen enforcement of health and safety standards, especially in ethnic enclave industries such as the Koreatown restaurant industry.

**6. Promote partnerships between government agencies and community organizations.** Partnerships between agencies, such as CAL/OSHA and local community organizations, should be promoted and supported as a strategy to improve education and enforcement.

**7. Support access to health care for workers and immigrants.** In addition to a safer work environment, immigrant workers need access to affordable health care. At a time when health insurance costs have become unaffordable for many employers, the community should support legislation on a state and/or federal level for health care reform.

# Introduction

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## I. Background

The Korean American community is one of the largest Asian populations in Southern California. Its restaurant industry centered in Koreatown, Los Angeles is one of the community's largest low-wage employers, currently employing over 5,000 Korean and Latino workers.

While there has been research on occupational health and safety conditions in mainstream restaurants, there is little data on the conditions specific to restaurants in an ethnic enclave industry and how the characteristics particular to that industry can present unique health and safety challenges. Koreatown's restaurant industry is unique from the mainstream restaurant industry for several reasons:

- The density of restaurants makes this a very competitive industry. The intense competition often contributes to understaffing or lack of space, which makes workplace injuries more likely.
- Gentrification in Koreatown has made rent extremely costly, which can lead owners to “cut corners” for higher profits.
- Any industry in an insular ethnic enclave like Koreatown that has a high concentration of smaller businesses is also highly difficult for government agencies to regulate.
- The Koreatown restaurant industry attracts both residents and visitors, and is an integral part of the Koreatown economy.
- Koreatown restaurants use unique equipment not typically found in mainstream restaurants, e.g. BBQ grills, hot stone pots, the large number of small side dishes, etc. Working with this equipment can lead to unique and significant burdens on workers.

The results of this survey further explore the substandard conditions documented since the early 1990's, confirming that they continue to be a problem today in Koreatown workplaces. A past study on occupational health and safety in Koreatown workers *in general* showed that an alarming rate of workers suffer from workplace injuries. In a 1995 KIWA survey of 100



Koreatown workers employed in various local industries, 40% of the workers reported injuries that resulted in medical treatment or lost work days.<sup>1</sup> Yet, workers had no access to healthcare with 75% reported having no health insurance or workers compensation. A majority (89%) of the workers reported never receiving health and safety training. A subsequent KIWA study in 2000 on general labor conditions in the Koreatown restaurant industry also indicated that injuries

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were high in the area, and access to healthcare extremely low.<sup>2</sup>

As the Koreatown restaurant industry expanded from 280 restaurants with 2000 workers to 550 restaurants with approximately 6,000 workers in the past seven years, KIWA members continued to identify health and safety as a major problem in the restaurant industry. Thus, we felt it was timely and necessary to conduct research that delved in-depth into the occupational health and safety conditions of our local restaurants.

## II. Methodology

A 48-question survey was designed and administered to restaurant workers in Koreatown by KIWA organizers in a period of eight months, from April 2006 to November 2006, resulting in a total sample of 91 Korean and Latino workers from a variety of Korean-owned restaurants in Koreatown, Los Angeles. We surveyed workers from Korean tofu, noodle, BBQ, and sushi restaurants, as well as bar/restaurants, totaling approximately 50 different establishments.



Organizers mapped out the Koreatown restaurant industry, tracked workers' shifts, and visited restaurants to recruit workers to complete the surveys. Also, organizers surveyed existing KIWA members and talked to workers at laundromats, bus stops and street corners. Some challenges we encountered were workers' fear of facing retaliation or other negative consequences for participating in the survey, as well as the difficulty for workers to take time to talk to us in between long hours, and sometimes, multiple jobs.

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<sup>1</sup> Chung, Angie Y., Kyung Min Shin, Noemi Garcia, Jung-Hee Lee, and Roman Vargas. 2000. *Workers Empowered: A Survey of Working Conditions in the Koreatown Restaurant Industry*. Los Angeles, CA: Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates. November.

<sup>2</sup> Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates, 1995. *Work and Health in the Immigrant Enclave: How Structural Violence at the Workplace Impacts the Health of L.A.'s Korean Immigrant Workers*. Los Angeles, CA: Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates.

# Findings

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## I. Demographics

Out of the 91 surveys were collected, 51 were in Korean and 40 were in Spanish. The ethnicities represented are shown in the following chart.

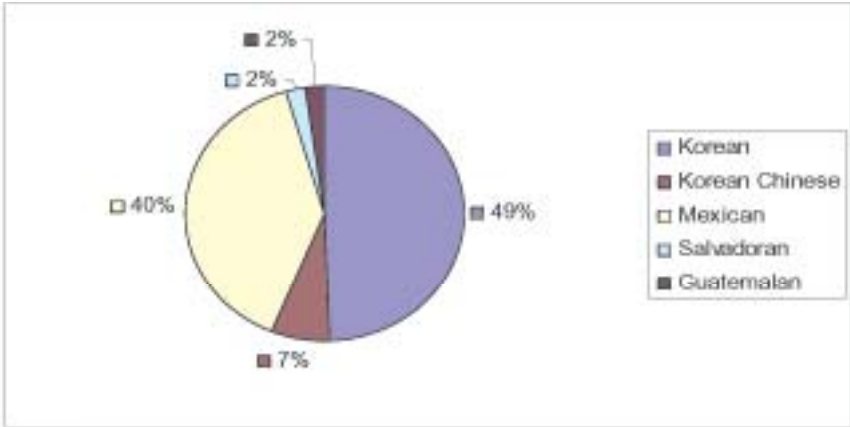


Figure 1.1

The Koreatown restaurant workforce is specialized by race and gender. Figure 1.2 shows that Latino workers tend to be male, and Korean workers tend to be female.

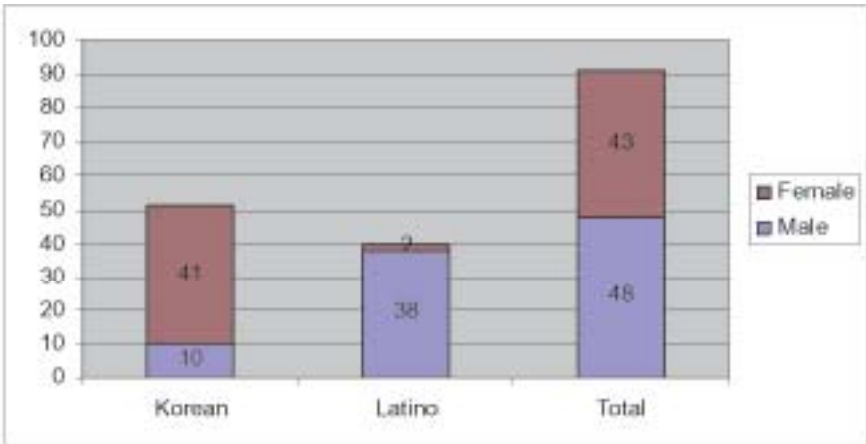


Figure 1.2

There is also a significant differential in age by race. On average, Korean workers (41.7 years old) are more than 10 years older than Latino workers (29.5 years old).

Both Latino and Korean restaurant workers tend to be recent immigrants. On average, Korean respondents reported to have lived in the U.S. for 7.5 years, while Latino respondents reported to have lived in the U.S. for 6.8 years.

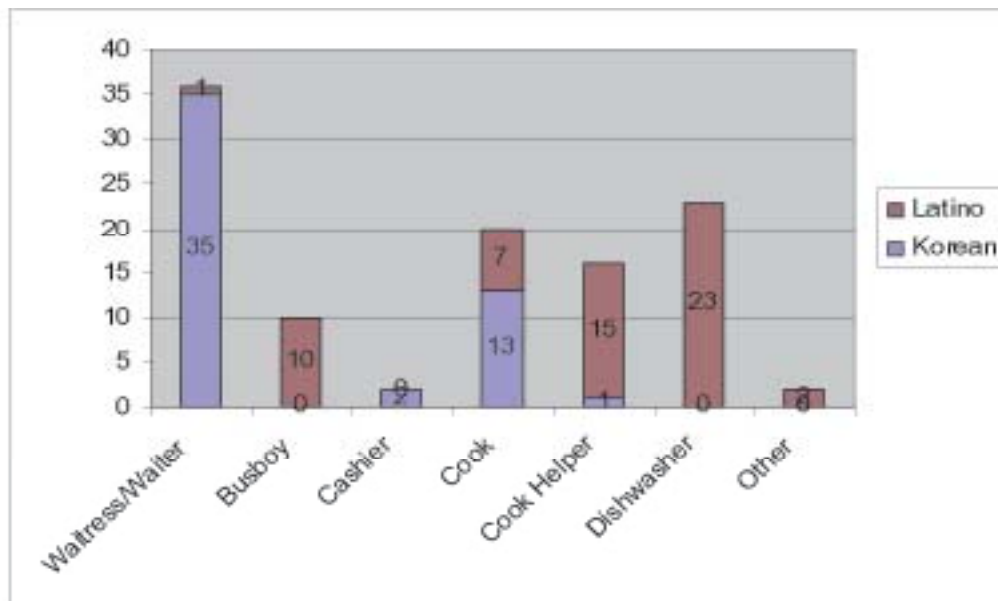
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The Koreatown restaurant industry tends to be a more transient employment for Latino workers than for Korean workers. On average, Korean respondents (26.2 months) reported to have worked longer in the restaurant currently employed than Latino respondents (18.9 months). On average, Korean respondents (62.3 months) reported to have worked longer in the restaurant industry than Latino respondents (36.1 months).

## II. Positions in Restaurants

The positions of Koreatown workers tend to be segregated by race. Each Korean worker surveyed holds only one position. Among Latino workers, 30% hold at least two positions.



**Figure 2.1**

Figure 2.1 illustrates the different positions of Latino and Korean workers. Of the surveyed Latino workers, 57.5% were dishwashers, 37.5% were cook helpers, and 25.0% were busboys. Of the surveyed Korean workers, 68.6% were waitresses/waiters and 25.5% were cooks.

The data indicated that Korean workers, who are mostly female, usually have positions at the “front of the restaurant,” and Latino workers tend to have position at the “back of the restaurant.”

Nevertheless, there are a few exceptions. Of the respondents, 50% of the Korean male workers are cooks. Also, there is a significant number of Latino workers who are busboys, but 70% of them also have responsibilities at the “back of the restaurant.”

### III. Labor Violations

Koreatown restaurant industry remains a largely unregulated industry that frequently violates health and safety laws, as well as labor laws. Two-thirds (67%) of the respondents reported that they work 40 hours or more per week. Only about 30% get paid over-time when they do so. More than 60% of restaurant workers surveyed have worked more than 4 hours straight without a paid break. Even though workplace injuries are typically prevalent in restaurants, less than 5% of the workers surveyed have ever applied for workers' compensation when injured on the job.

### IV. Occupational Health and Safety Conditions

Koreatown restaurant workers are exposed to dangerous work environments. Respondents reported to have been exposed to tasks that are fast in pace and stressful, which are known to lead to musculoskeletal disorders.

An overwhelming majority (98.0%) of the Korean respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement “My job is physically demanding,” and “My job requires working fast.” All of the Korean respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement “My job requires a lot of repetitive work.”

Similarly, a majority (92.1%) of the Latino respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement “My job requires a lot of repetitive work.” A majority (87.2%) of the Latino respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement, “My job is physically demanding.”

Furthermore, Korean and Latino workers reported physical exertion in different tasks, which reflected on their job positions. Korean respondents

“I am 43 years old and it’s only been a year since I came to the US. Before coming to the US, my work experience was as a department director for a trade company for 15 years in Korea.

However, when I came to the US, I began to work in the restaurants, which I have never done before. To protect my family’s livelihood, I found a job at a Korean restaurant through the local newspaper, and when the owner asked me if I could start today, I did so immediately.

My job consisted of using the meat cutting machine to serve meat on a large plate. First, I was scared of doing this job, but I did my job and followed the owner’s instructions to put the power plug in, and to the place the meat in the machine when the saw edges move, and let the machine cut the meat. After working for about a week, half of my index finger (about 0.5 inches), including the glove that I was wearing, was cut off by the machine.

I am currently receiving treatment, but I think that accidents like mine could have been prevented if I had received systematic training on operating instructions and dangers of using the machine.”

- Mr. Kim, from Korea, Restaurant Worker in Koreatown

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reported that the top 3 tasks that require physical exertion are: (1) picking up or transporting plates and glasses (65.3%); (2) cutting or chopping (38.6%); and (3) cooking and standing over heat (33.3%). Latino respondents reported that the top 3 tasks that require physical exertion are: (1) sweeping or mopping (74.4%); (2) picking up or transporting plates and glasses (68.4%); and (3) lifting, reaching and moving boxes (55.3%).

Many respondents reported *moderate* or *severe* pains or discomfort in multiple body parts when performing the tasks at their daily work. As Figure 4.1 shows, both Latino and Korean respondents indicated that they suffer from pains in the lower back.

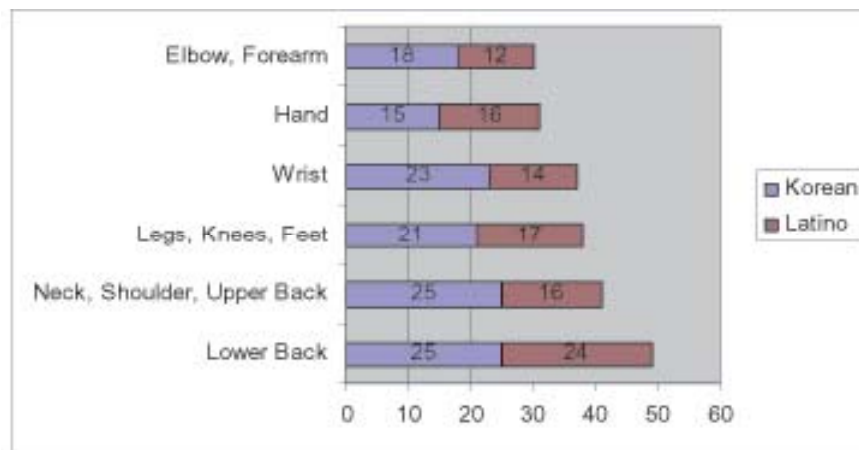


Figure 4.1

In addition to their tasks, workers are often exposed to a work environment that makes injuries or illness more likely.

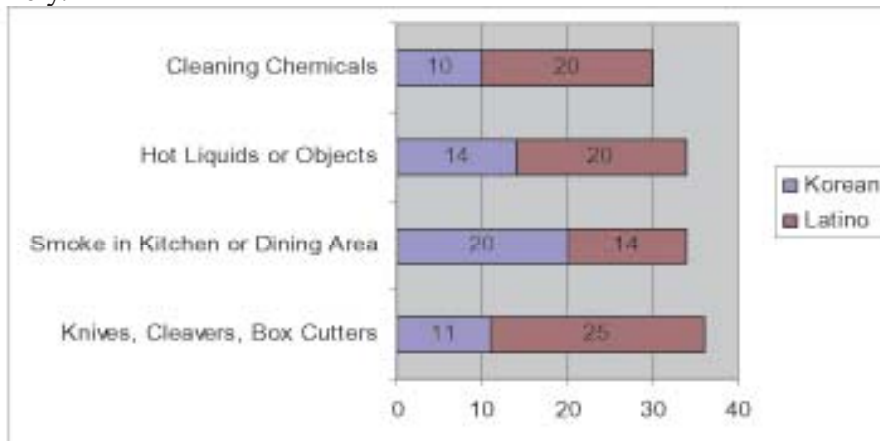


Figure 4.2

Figure 4.2 indicates that 62.5% of Latino respondents reported to have been exposed to knives, cleavers, box cutters, while 39.2% Korean respondents reported to have been exposed to smoke.

Workers also find themselves in work environment that makes injuries more likely.

- More than half (50.6%) of the respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they are “often pressured, either physically or verbally, to work faster.”
- Almost half *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that “There are often no enough workers to handle all the work” (47.7%), and that they are “often required to work for long periods in uncomfortable positions” (47.6%).
- More than 1 in 4 respondents (28.0%) reported that they never or rarely have enough workspace.

Research has shown that workers who are understaffed and often under intense time/space pressure are more likely to forgo workplace safety and proper food handling measures, which lead to injuries to themselves and negative health outcomes to customers.<sup>3</sup>

## V. Precautionary Measures

Despite working with hazardous materials, many workers and employers do not take precautionary measures to reduce the likelihood of injuries or illness.

“I have been working as a waitress in the Koreatown restaurant industry for about 10 years. After working in many different restaurants, I learned that waitresses need to work fast to serve as many customers during the set lunch/dinner times. To ensure that customers were satisfied with the service, I transported a large number of dishes on trays instead of on carts.

It’s been a long time since I developed chronic pain in my wrists and shoulders. And recently, I was injured at work when I slipped on the floor while I was carrying a dirty dish box with my hands after putting away the dishes into the dish box from the tables.

After these experiences, I feel that there is a strong need for change to the working conditions in the restaurants. In order to prevent injuries, there needs to be training on workplace safety and on using equipments safely, as well as regular investigations on workplace safety.”

- Mrs. Park, from Korea, Restaurant Worker in Koreatown

- Almost two-thirds (65.8%) reported that they *never* or *rarely* wear gloves when washing dishes.
- Thirty percent (30.0%) reported that they do not have enough ventilation in their work area.

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<sup>3</sup> Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York and the New York City Restaurant Industry Coalition. *Dining Out, Dining Healthy: The Link between Public Health and Working Conditions in New York City’s Restaurant Industry*. New York, New York. April 2006.

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- Twenty-eight percent (28.0%) reported that they *never* or *rarely* have enough workspace.
- Almost 1 in 5 respondents (21.4%) reported that they are *never* or *rarely* free of electrical cords, boxes or other storage.

Although it is not clear from the findings whether these safety equipments were not provided to the workers adequately or at all, or the workers chose not to use them, the findings indicated that workers lacked some of the most basic equipments that can prevent workplace injuries.

- More than 1 in 5 respondents (21.4%) reported that they never or rarely have non-slip mats to cover the floor.
- About fourteen percent (14.1%) reported they never or rarely use potholders to hold some thing hot.
- More than half of the Latino respondents (54.8%) do not know where the first aid kit is.

“I am a restaurant worker and I worked at a Korean restaurant for 4 months. My job involved lifting a heavy pot of hot water with a co-worker. It weighed around 170 pounds. One day, when I was trying to lift it, I hurt my back and two of my ribs. I talked to my boss about my injury, but he started laughing, and he refused to take me to the doctor. I was in so much pain that I sought for help.

I went to KIWA, and they referred me to a lawyer. After talking to my lawyer, my employer offered to take me to the doctor, but I told him that I was already seeing a doctor. My employer was not happy about that, and he threatened me, saying that he would call the police if I did not withdraw my workers’ compensation claim. He even said that the police would deport me because I did not have documents.”

- Maria, from Mexico, Restaurant Worker in Koreatown

The tasks that are the most physically demanding and the fastest pace for Korean workers are: (1) picking up or transporting plates/glasses; (2) cooking or standing over heat; and (3) cutting or chopping. Forty percent of the Korean respondents indicated that picking up or transporting plates/glasses was somewhat demanding or very demanding, and 54.7% of the respondents indicated that this task was fast or very fast.

The tasks that are the most physically demanding and the fastest pace for Latino workers are: (1) sweeping or mopping; (2) picking up or transporting plates/glasses; and (3) lifting, reaching, moving boxes. Sixty-five percent of the Latino respondents indicated that picking up or transporting plates/glasses was somewhat demanding or very demanding, and 54.1% of the respondents indicated that this task was fast or very fast.

As Figure 5.1 demonstrates, a majority of the respondents reported they have not received any training regarding any aspect of workplace safety.

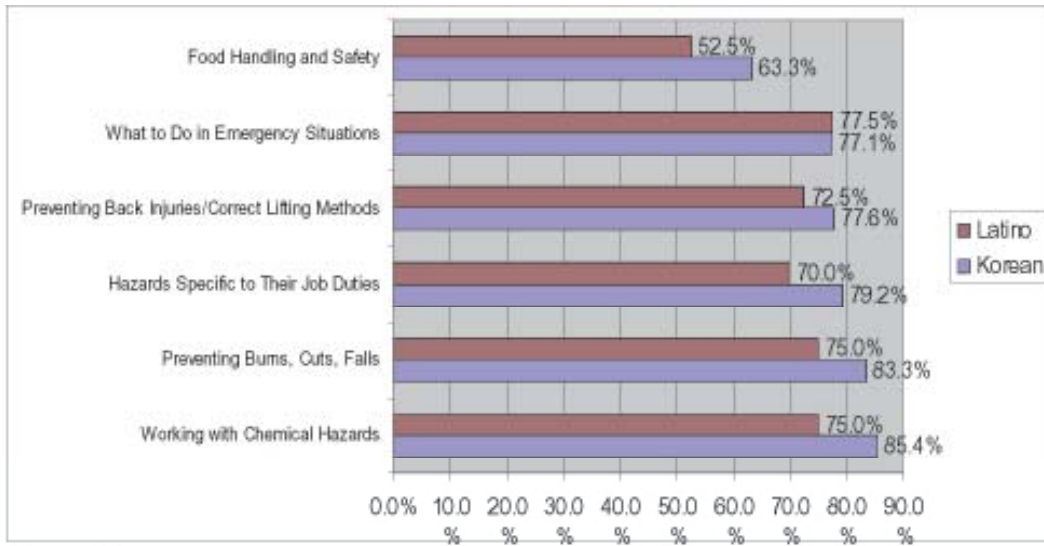


Figure 5.1

## VI. Incident of Injuries & Health Conditions

The findings indicate that exposure to a dangerous environment and the lack of precautionary measures and training contribute to incidents of workplace injuries. Figure 6.1 shows that almost 2 out of 5 respondents reported having suffered a burn or a cut at work in the last 6 months. About 1 in 8 slipped or fell in the same time period.

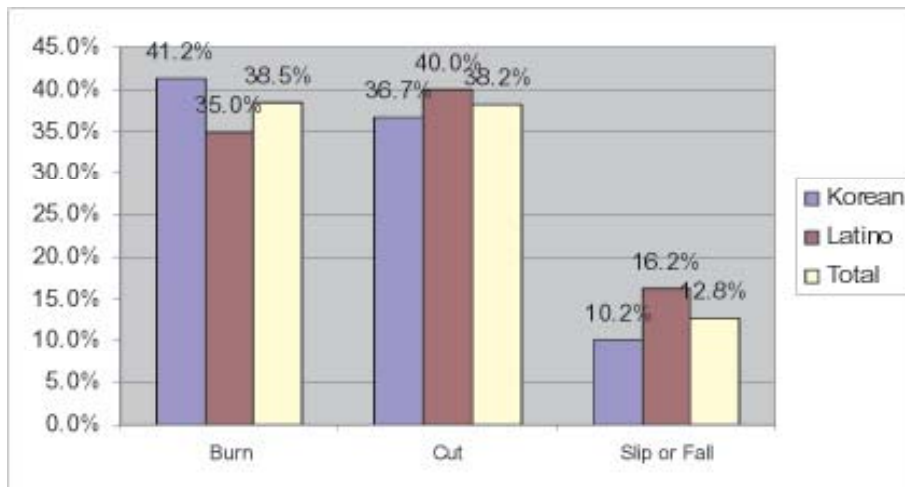


Figure 6.1

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“In 2006, while I was working at a Korean restaurant, I suffered an injury. I cut the palm of my hand deep while I was cutting meat. When the cook saw my cut, he immediately ran to the owner, and let her know what happened. The owner instructed one of the cashiers to spread some flour in the cut and put a bandage on it. After that, the owner told me that everything was fine, and that I should wear a glove and keep working. Even though I felt pain all over my arm, I had to keep on working.

The next day, I was taken to a clinic where, without any explanation, I received eight stitches. The doctor recommended me to rest for a week. After resting for a week, I went back to my job, but after working for a couple of hours, my hand started to hurt so much, and I could barely move it. When I let the owner know that I still had a lot of pain and that I had to go home, she was not happy about that. I sought legal advice, and was referred to a doctor who treated me and sent me to physical therapy. I was in therapy for 4 months, and after that I worked for just 3 days before getting fired.”

- Alfonso, from Zacatecas Mexico, Restaurant Worker in Koreatown

In addition to accidents, many respondents also reported chronic health symptoms. A majority (74.5%) of Korean respondents suffered from fatigue. 2 out of 5 Latino respondents suffered from headaches, hand stiffness and hand rashes.

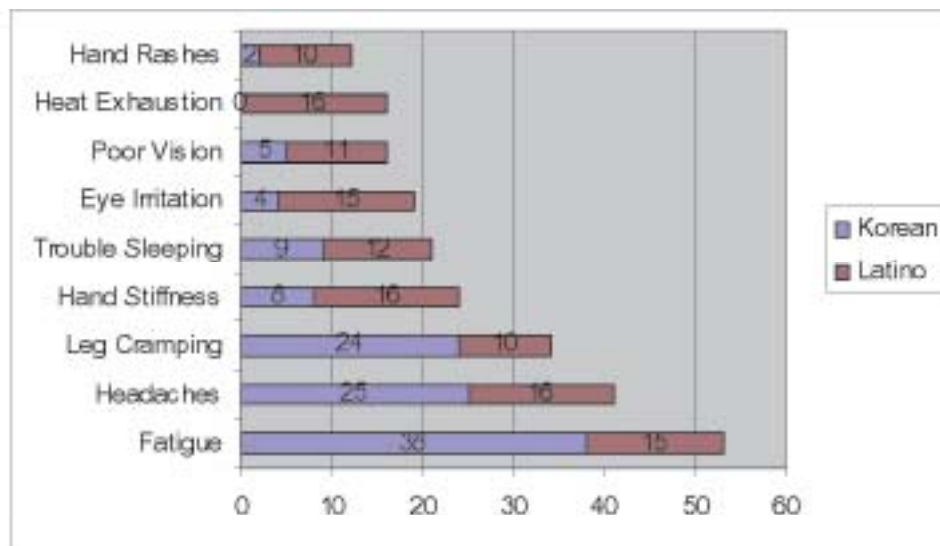


Figure 6.2

## VII. Access to Healthcare

These chronic conditions are allowed to continue because many of the workers lack access to health insurance. Respondents were asked whether or not they have health insurance, regardless of who pays for it. An overwhelming majority (95.3%) of the respondents reported they do not have health insurance.

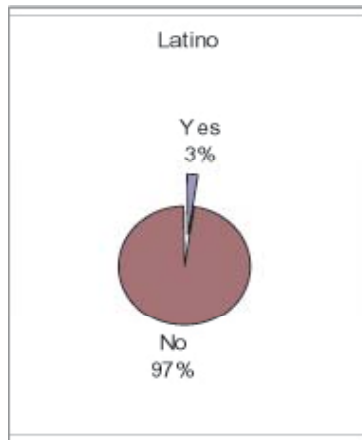


Figure 7.1

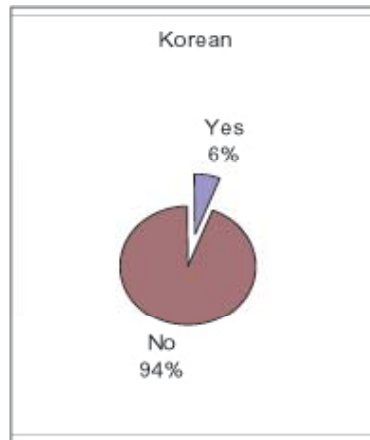


Figure 7.2

## VIII. Summary

The findings reveal alarming statistics on the health and safety conditions of Koreatown restaurant workers. There is much work need to be done to improve health and safety in the industry.

- The Koreatown restaurant industry is fast-paced and stressful. A majority of respondents reported that they *agree* or *strongly agree* with the statement, “My job is physically demanding.”
- Many workers surveyed were exposed to dangerous work environments. Sixty-five percent of respondents reported that they never or rarely wear gloves when washing dishes.
- A majority of respondents reported they have not received any workplace safety training.
- Many respondents reported chronic health symptoms, such as fatigue, headaches and leg cramping.
- Findings show that unsafe working conditions and lack of safety training contributes to workplace injuries. Thirty-eight percent of respondents reported to have suffered a burn or a cut in the last 6 months.
- An alarmingly number of respondents (95.3%) reported that they do not have health insurance.

# Recommendations

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Improvements in the restaurant industry made through changes in the health and safety will be rewarding for the employers, the workers, the customers and the community. Promoting a healthy and safe workplace can only be successful when the restaurant industry and the local community are committed to working together. The various roles that our community should take are suggested as recommendations in the following section.

**1. Employers need to take responsibility for improving health and safety conditions.**

Workplace injuries result in loss of money, time and productivity. Research suggests a high correlation between unsafe workplace practices and labor violations, which subject businesses to fines or even closures.

However, workplace safety can help create a more stable, efficient, and healthy workforce. It is the responsibility of owners and managers to implement policies and procedures to prevent workplace injuries in a systemic way. Owners and managers should provide trainings on health and safety to help workers understand its importance, as well as provide safety equipment.

**2. Workers need to learn how to protect themselves on the job.**

Overworked workers who are under constant time or space pressure sometimes cannot take all the precautions necessary to prevent workplace injuries. The current study found that unsafe workplaces and lack of training contributes to workplace injuries and chronic health problems. When workers suffer injuries and develop health problems, their families suffer as well.

Restaurant workers need to protect themselves from injuries while becoming more effective and efficient by participating in restaurant health and safety training programs and learning about the ways to creating a safe and healthy workplace.

**3. Diners need to make responsible choices.**

As consumers, diners need to inform themselves in order to be able to make responsible choices about the businesses they choose to patronage. Research indicates that violations of labor law and health and safety codes pose a risk on public health, such as handling food improperly, and contaminating food from sneezing or coughing.<sup>4</sup> The quality of labor conditions and worker training can have direct consequences for diners in the quality and safety of the food they will be eating. Diners should support those restaurants that do make the effort to abide by labor and health and safety regulations.

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<sup>4</sup> Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York and the New York City Restaurant Industry Coalition. *Dining Out, Dining Healthy: The Link between Public Health and Working Conditions in New York City's Restaurant Industry*. New York, New York. April 2006.

In addition to the responsibilities of owners and managers, workers and diners, there are broader policies that we recommend:

**4. Support worker organizations that improve conditions for workers.**

The community should support workers' efforts to organize themselves into community organizations, associations and unions that work to improve employment conditions that can result in a healthier business and a stronger local economy.

**5. Provide government agencies with adequate education and enforcement funds.**

The state government should increase education and enforcement funding for CAL/OSHA, which is the government agency that is responsible for protecting the health and safety of workers in California, so that CAL/OSHA can conduct more inspections in Koreatown to keep the restaurant industry transparent and safe for the community.

**6. Promote partnerships between government agencies and community organizations.**

Partnerships between CAL/OSHA and community organizations, such as KIWA will facilitate the process of educating workers and owners about workplace health and safety and enforcing existing regulations in an ethnic community.

**7. Support Access to health care for workers.**

In addition to a safer work environment, workers need access to affordable health care. At a time when health insurance costs have become unaffordable for many employers as well, the community should support legislate on a state and/or federal level for health care reform.



# Appendix

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## Koreatown Restaurant Workers Health and Safety Survey (2006)

### I. General Employment

1. What is the type of the restaurant that you currently work at? (Please check all that apply.)

- BBQ                                       Tofu House                       Sushi                       Bar Restaurant  
 Noodles/Soup                       Other (Please specify)

2. What is your current position at this restaurant? (Please check all that apply.)

- Cook                                       Cook Helper                       Waitress/Waiter  
 Busboy                                       Dishwasher                       Cashier  
 Other (Please specify)

3. How long have you worked at this restaurant? \_\_\_\_\_ Month(s), \_\_\_\_\_ Year(s)

4. How long have you been a restaurant worker in the U.S.? \_\_\_\_\_ Month(s), \_\_\_\_\_ Year(s)

5. On average, how many hours per week do you work at this job?

6. How much do you earn per hour before taxes, not including tips? \$ \_\_\_\_\_

7. When you work over 40 hours a week, do you get paid over-time (e.g. time-and-a-half)?

- Yes                       No                       I never work over 40 hours per week.

8. Have you applied for workers' compensation when injured on the job?

- Yes                       No                       I don't know.

9. Have you ever worked more than 4 hours straight without a paid break (excluding lunch)?

- Yes                       No                       I don't know.

10. How many paid vacation days do you have per year?

- None                       I don't know.

11. How many paid sick days do you have per year?

- None                       I don't know.

12. Have you been pressured to work, even when you were sick or injured?

- Yes                       No

13. Do you currently have more than one job?  Yes                       No

### II. Exposure Questions

#### Part A: Stress/Pace.

14. We would like to know about your current job as a restaurant worker. Please read each statement and circle the number that indicates whether you agree or disagree with the statement.

## At Risk in the Restaurant

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
14a. My job requires working fast.	1	2	3	4
14b. My job requires a lot of repetitive work.	1	2	3	4
14c. My job is physically demanding.	1	2	3	4
14d. I'm often required to work for long periods with my body in uncomfortable positions.	1	2	3	4
14e. I'm often pressured to work overtime.	1	2	3	4
14f. I'm often pressured, either physically or verbally, to work faster.	1	2	3	4
14g. I'm often required to do things that make me feel like I might be at risk of getting hurt.	1	2	3	4
14h. There are often not enough workers on my shift to handle all the work.	1	2	3	4
14i. Language barrier is a big problem between me and my co-workers, managers, and employers when it comes to safety on the job?	1	2	3	4

### Part B: Physical Exertion

15. How often do you have to do the following tasks?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
15a. cutting or chopping	1	2	3	4
15b. lifting, reaching or moving boxes	1	2	3	4
15c. cooking or standing over heat	1	2	3	4
15d. cleaning equipment	1	2	3	4
15e. picking up plates or glasses	1	2	3	4
15f. sweeping or mopping	1	2	3	4
15g. running or walking up and down the stairs	1	2	3	4
16. How physically demanding are the following tasks?	Not at all demanding	A little demanding	Somewhat demanding	Very demanding
16a. cutting or chopping	1	2	3	4
16b. lifting, reaching or moving boxes	1	2	3	4
16c. cooking or standing over heat	1	2	3	4
16d. cleaning equipment	1	2	3	4
16e. picking up plates or glasses	1	2	3	4
16f. sweeping or mopping	1	2	3	4
16g. running or walking up and down the stairs	1	2	3	4
17. How fast do you have to perform the following tasks?	Slow	Fair	Fast	Very fast
17a. cutting or chopping	1	2	3	4
17b. lifting, reaching or moving boxes	1	2	3	4

## At Risk in the Restaurant

17c. cooking or standing over heat	1	2	3	4
17d. cleaning equipment	1	2	3	4
17e. picking up plates or glasses	1	2	3	4
17f. sweeping or mopping	1	2	3	4
17g. running or walking up and down the stairs	1	2	3	4

18. How much pain/discomfort do you experience from the tasks above?

	None	Mild	Moderate	Severe
18a. Neck or upper back	1	2	3	4
18b. Shoulder	1	2	3	4
18c. Elbow	1	2	3	4
18d. Forearm	1	2	3	4
18e. Wrist	1	2	3	4
18f. Hand	1	2	3	4
18g. Lower back	1	2	3	4
18h. Legs, knees, or feet	1	2	3	4

### Part C: Other Exposures

19. Are you exposed to smoke in the kitchen or dining area?  Yes  No

19a. If yes, how often?

- less than once a day     less than 1 hour/day     1 – 2 hours/day  
 2 – 4 hours/day     more than 4 hours/day

20. How often do you work with the following supplies or equipment?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
20a. ...cleaning chemicals	1	2	3	4
20b. ...liquid pesticides	1	2	3	4
20c. ...knives, cleavers, or box cutters	1	2	3	4
20d. ...meat cutters	1	2	3	4
20e. ...hot liquids (oil, water) or objects	1	2	3	4

### Part D: Precautionary Measures

	Not At All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
21. Do you wear gloves or use potholders?	1	2	3	4
22. Do you use damp cloths as potholders?	1	2	3	4
23. Do you use splash guards when frying?	1	2	3	4
24. Do you have non-slip mats to cover the floor?	1	2	3	4
25. Do you have enough work space?	1	2	3	4
26. Are walkways free of electrical cords, boxes or other storage?	1	2	3	4
27. Do you have to walk back and forth from a hot stove to a refrigerator or freezer?	1	2	3	4
28. Do you have enough ventilation in your work area?	1	2	3	4



## At Risk in the Restaurant

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If yes, have you or a family member gone to the emergency room without being able to pay?

- Yes                       No

### IV. Training

42. Have you been trained about...

- 42a. ...the chemicals that you work with, including their potential hazards and correct way to work with them to protect yourself from exposure?       Yes       No       I don't know.
- 42b. ...how to prevent burns, cuts or falls, including how to use protective clothing or equipment?       Yes       No       I don't know.
- 42c. ...what to do during an emergency or when you or someone else is injured?       Yes       No       I don't know.
- 42d. ...any hazards associated with your job duties and how to do your job safely to avoid these hazards?       Yes       No       I don't know.
- 42e. ...how to prevent back injuries by lifting or carrying heavy things properly?       Yes       No       I don't know.
- 42f. ...how to handle food safely?       Yes       No       I don't know.

### V. Demographic Information

43. Sex:       Male                                       Female

44. How old were you on your last birthday?

45. What is your race/ethnicity? (Please check one.)

- Korean                       Korean Chinese                       Mexican  
 Salvadoran                       Guatemalan                       Honduran  
 Vietnamese                       South Asian                       Other (please specify).

46. How many years have you lived in the U.S.?

47. What is your preferred spoken language?

- Korean                       Chinese                       Spanish                       English  
 Other (please specify)

48. General comments about health and safety issues on the job: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance  
3465 West 8th Street  
Los Angeles CA 90005  
Phone: (213) 738-9050  
Fax: (213) 839-1833  
Website: [www.kiwa.org](http://www.kiwa.org)  
Email: [kiwa@kiwa.org](mailto:kiwa@kiwa.org)