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# Downtown Building Workers:

## Working conditions in our office buildings

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### Janitors



Full-time union janitors in DC get at least 6 paid sick days, part-time janitors get only 3 days, and non-union janitors may not get any.

**SEIU local 32BJ** is the union that represents almost 85% of the janitors in commercial buildings in DC.

**Full-time janitors earn \$9.80** per hour while **part-time janitors earn \$9.30**. Like other building service workers, many have to work 2 to 3 part-time jobs to make ends meet.

**Most janitors work part-time**, about 20 to 25 hours per week. Part-time workers generally receive fewer benefits than full-time workers. Only the 750 most senior part-time janitors receive health insurance paid for by their employer.

Companies save money by constantly **increasing the number of suites** janitors have to clean during one shift. Some janitors literally run their entire shift to get everything done. In addition, some cleaners encounter worksite health and safety problems. Documented incidents include rat

bites, chemical exposure, concussions, electric shock, and hernia. Many workers have reported that they are not trained in their language on the use of workplace chemicals and protective equipment.

### Security Officers

Private security is one of the top 10 fastest growing occupations in the U.S., with over **2,000 officers guarding buildings in DC** alone. The low wages and lack of benefits force many security officers to work more than one job.

In DC, pay is between **\$8 for newer workers** in most buildings and \$12 for higher-paid officers in government buildings. Most officers don't get benefits, paid vacation or sick leave.

Hours are often irregular and can change with little notice, making things difficult for parents. In addition, there is **almost no training** for these important and potentially dangerous jobs.

But change is on the way! This spring, security officers won their campaign to make the major security companies in DC recognize their union, SEIU local 32BJ. Soon they will begin bargaining a city-wide union contract to lift up working conditions in the private security industry.



When security companies compete to win contract bids, **officers' wages and benefits are slashed** to cut costs.

# Parking Workers



With parking costing as much as **\$15 a day**, the first 5 cars a worker parks pays their entire wage for the day, leaving **big profits** for parking companies and building owners.

About half of the parking workers in DC are members of **UNITE HERE Local 27**, including workers at the companies Central, Standard and Denison.

Workers in the parking industry make **between \$7 and \$10 per hour**, with the average wage being around \$8 per hour.

Union parking companies provide their workers access to affordable health insurance (workers pay \$5/mo. for single coverage or \$150/mo. for family), but at most non-union companies, the employee contribution for benefits is prohibitively high.

Workers at the unionized parking companies are currently in the process of bargaining a new contract, and hope to increase wages. Since only half the parking industry is unionized, it has been hard to win gains because **companies that provide higher wages and better benefits lose business** to companies that are non-union.

## Quick Facts on Downtown Building Workers

	Parking Workers		Security Officers	Janitors	
	Union	Non-union*		Full-time	Part-time
Starting hourly wage	\$7.00	\$7.00	\$8.00	\$9.80	\$9.30
Sick days per year**	After 90 days, accrue ½ day per month	Varies	None	After 6 mos., accrue ½ day per month	After 1 year, can accrue 3 days per year.
Health benefits offered?	Yes	Yes	Sometimes	Single coverage only	Single coverage for 750 most senior workers only
Monthly healthcare cost to employee, single coverage	\$0 - \$15	\$55 - \$111	Up to \$200	\$0	\$0 (for 750 most senior)
Monthly healthcare cost to employee, family coverage	\$150 - \$170	\$302 - \$370	\$200 and up	NA	NA

\*Research by HERE local 27 in 2003; healthcare costs to non-union workers are most likely higher today.

\*\* An estimated 209,000 workers in DC (including some building workers) do not receive paid sick days. For parking workers and janitors, the small amount of leave they have may only be used for their own illness, but not for preventative care, a family member's illness, or to care for a family member.

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## How can tenants support downtown building workers?

### Understanding DC's Commercial Building Industry

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The commercial office market in DC is *booming* – it's arguably the strongest in the nation. Building owners and property managers are prospering along with the owners of contracted cleaning, security and parking companies working in their buildings. However, few of the workers who keep the District's office buildings clean and safe receive living wages or adequate benefits, and with frequent contract switches, many janitors and security officers are subject to high turnover in this unstable industry.

#### Model buildings:

##### 501 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, NW

At this building owned by the Communications Workers of America, part-time janitors receive:

- Hourly wages of \$12.10, which will go up to \$13 in 2008.
- 12 paid sick days a year
- 12 paid holidays
- Extended paid vacation for senior employees.

##### 1775 K Street, NW

At this building owned by the United Food and Commercial Workers, janitors receive:

- Hourly wages of \$11.80 for night janitors (going up to \$12.25 in 2008).
- Hourly wages of \$12.05 for day janitors (going up to \$12.50 in 2008).
- 12 paid sick days a year.
- 12 paid holidays
- Lay-off protections.

#### The Role of Competition

Cleaning and security companies that provide building services compete for contracts, and parking companies compete for leases. Because most property managers don't take the treatment of workers into account when considering a bid, contractors have an incentive to minimize labor costs in order to offer the lowest bid.

If a majority of the companies in a certain sector are unionized, as is the case with cleaning companies, they can choose to have one common (or "master") contract that covers all their workers. This means the companies will have an even playing field for labor costs, and will compete instead based on the quality of service.

#### Tenants Can Make a Difference

Building owners and property management companies have the ability to set higher standards for contracted workers in their buildings. Many buildings owned by progressive organizations require contractors to provide a level of pay, benefits, and leave far above the industry standard (see side bar for examples). Because building owners and property managers care about the concerns of their renters, tenants have the potential to be powerful voices for better standards for workers in their buildings.

#### Differences Among Buildings

Workers and tenants have more or less power to negotiate with property managers to make change depending on their building. A few factors include:

- **Class A, B or C:** Office rents are highest in Class A buildings, lowest in Class C. Because requiring contractors to provide higher pay and benefits will likely mean higher contract costs, property managers in Class C buildings, where profit margins are lowest, are likely to be more reluctant than property managers in Class A buildings.
- **Building size:** Workers in buildings over 100,000 square feet are covered by a DC law that guarantees that workers keep their jobs when contracts change. Also, SEIU's master contract with union cleaning companies only applies to these buildings.

# **Building Benefits:**

How Building Tenants Can Support Building Workers.



*The vision of the Building Benefits project is to create a coalition of tenants who can advocate together for better standards for workers in their office buildings, both by engaging with their property managers and by supporting legislation that will raise standards for all workers in DC. You can help by taking action as an organization, and by reaching out to other tenants in your building to join you.*

***As part of the Building Benefits project, there are several ways tenants can strategically make a difference in the lives of workers in their buildings:***

- **Support legislation to raise employment standards city-wide**

This January, there will be bills introduced to the DC Council to guarantee paid sick leave days for all workers in DC. Endorsements from organizations who rent office space will help demonstrate to Councilmembers that there is broad support for these policies.

- **Support workers who are bargaining contracts**

Security officers at a number of companies are in the process of forming a union. They will likely be ready to bargain their first contract in the Spring of 2007. Janitors will have a chance to win a better contract in March of 2008. When tenants speak up in support of these demands, especially to property managers, it can make a big difference.

- **Develop and promote policies that take workers into account**

Tenants can work together to develop and promote a model policy that would help property managers take the employment conditions of workers into account when granting contracts, or that would set minimum standards that property managers could require contractors to meet.

- **Get other tenants in your building involved**

The more tenants who are involved in this effort, the more effective we can be. Host a meeting at your office and invite other tenants in the building to learn about building workers and how they can get involved.

- **Build relationships with workers in your building**

The best support system for workers is to have trusting relationships with friendly folks where they work. By making an effort to have casual conversations with service workers day to day, you will be the first to know if something bad happens to them and you'll be able to work together to respond.