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# Standards for Employment of Women in Industry



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RECOMMENDED BY  
THE WOMEN'S BUREAU  
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Bulletin No. 173

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## Need for Standards

GREAT changes in women's work have come about in a little more than a century, as the result of transferring industry from the home to the factory. While at the beginning of this period women were unpaid workers in the home, making articles and rendering services for their families, they have emerged in gradually increasing numbers as wage workers outside their homes helping to manufacture goods or performing services for the public.

When women's work was confined to their homes, they could control to a large extent their working conditions. Now they are but cogs in a gigantic machine, and control has shifted from their hands to those of industrial management. Because this system in so many cases has not provided standards of working conditions, hours, and wages adequate for women's welfare, Federal and State governments have had to step in with another type of control—the labor law.

The Nation's best interests demand high labor standards for women. Many who are mothers and homemakers must be wage earners as well, for the modern industrial system requires them to carry heavy burdens of family support. Where women work under low standards they become the unwilling competitors of men, undercutting men's standards. As women's bargaining power has always been weaker than that of men, they have been exploited to a greater degree, and therefore a larger measure of public concern and control is necessary in their employment.

What constitute adequate standards for women in industry? How are these developed and to whom should they apply?

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## Development of Standards

Labor standards are not stationary but are influenced by continuously changing conditions. Widespread unemployment has speeded the movement for a shorter workday. The vital need for adequate purchasing power in the hands of labor has stimulated the movement for higher wages. When the danger of a specific industrial poison has been proved, regulations prohibiting its use have followed. Thus standards are raised chiefly as a result of scientific advancement and enlightened public opinion.

Labor standards are developed through many channels—employers, unions, governmental and private agencies. Such standards should apply to all workers who need their protection. There were about seven million women wage workers in the producing, distributing, and service trades at the time of the last Nation-wide census to whom these standards developed by the Women's Bureau should apply. The somewhat different standards essential to safeguard the more than two million women in household and agricultural employment require special consideration.

The standards here recommended are not all-inclusive—they may not even represent all the best or the most recent practices adopted by exceptional employers. But they are basic in any program concerned with the health, efficiency, and security of women workers.

## On Working Time

Hours of work are getting shorter. The 5-day week of 40 hours or even less, though unknown a dozen years ago, is now a schedule widely used. Short hours are needed if our unemployed are to find jobs and workers are to be healthy, safe, and efficient.

Standards relating to working hours should include:

1. Not more than 8 hours of work a day or 40 a week.
2. A 5-day week; 2 days of rest in 7, preferably Saturday and Sunday.
3. Meal periods of at least 30 minutes. No work period of more than 5 hours without a break for meal or rest.
4. Overtime to be avoided; if this is not possible, to be paid at the rate of time and a half or more.
5. On monotonous or high-speed jobs, a rest period of at least 10 minutes in the middle of each work period without lengthening the workday.
6. No woman to work between midnight and 6 a. m.
7. Some vacation with pay after 6 months on the job; a longer vacation after longer service.
8. Time off from the job with pay on principal legal holidays.

## On Wages

Living standards for workers depend directly on earnings. A good daily or weekly wage is not sufficient; employment for practically the whole of the year is necessary if workers are to earn an adequate living. On the volume of workers' yearly earnings depends their ability to buy back much of what they produce, and wage earners constitute two-thirds of all those engaged in gainful work in our country. To benefit all—labor, employers, farmers, and the general public—Federal and State governments are providing by law for a floor to wages as well as a ceiling to hours.

Wage standards should include the following:

1. Wage rates to be based on occupation, and not on the sex or race of the worker.
2. Minimum wages to be established through legislation.
3. Tipping to be abolished as an unsound method of pay; tips not to be considered as wages.
4. Cost of uniforms and their laundering, of breakage and spoilage, not to be deducted from wages but considered as a cost of production, just as are other supplies, upkeep and breakage of machinery.
5. Training of learners to be considered a legitimate expense of industry.
6. Wages to be paid regularly and in full, preferably once a week and on a fixed day.

THE GOAL—A GUARANTEE OF AN ANNUAL LIVING WAGE!

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## On Working Conditions

Modern employers have proved for themselves the value of good plant housekeeping, including adequate health and safety protection for workers. This means dollars in the pockets of the management. Employers who are behind the times should take prompt action to provide the following essentials:

1. Clean, uncrowded workrooms, with scientific ventilation adequate to meet all conditions in the particular industry.
  2. Safe workrooms, frequently inspected, with effective guards against risks from machinery, danger from fire, and exposure to dust, fumes, or other health hazards met on the job.
  3. Avoidance of use of poisonous substances; where these must be used, all known precautions to be taken.
  4. Good natural lighting and suitable artificial lighting by means of general and individual equipment; both types adequate for the job, without glare or flickering, and insuring right quality, distribution, and direction.
  5. A chair for each worker, built on posture lines and adjustable to both worker and job; wherever possible, change of posture to permit either sitting or standing.
  6. Good drinking facilities, with pure cool water, convenient to workers. Individual cups or sanitary bubbling fountains.
  7. Washing facilities in convenient locations with hot and cold water, soap, and individual towels. Dressing rooms next to washrooms with
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adequate care of clothing. Rest rooms with beds for workers taken sick, comfortable chairs and couches for use in rest or lunch periods.

8. Toilets for women in locations convenient to workrooms; a ratio of at least one toilet to every 15 women.
9. Lunchrooms separate from workrooms. Hot nourishing food to be available.
10. In a large plant, a hospital room with doctor and nurse; otherwise, first-aid equipment with a responsible person in charge and the emergency services of a doctor.
11. Avoidance of repeated lifting of heavy weights or other motions taxing women's strength unduly.

## On Industrial Home Work

Efforts should be made to abolish the industrial home-work system, with its long and irregular hours, night work, low earnings, and child labor. Since employers who use the labor of home workers can produce in direct competition with factory employers who have higher standards of hours, wages, and working conditions, home work is an unfair practice, undermining such standards.

## On Employer-Employee Relations

The democratic principle of trade-union organization for collective bargaining has been accepted as the fundamental basis for employer-employee relations. In union activities women

must take their part and should have full representation in proportion to their numbers.

The following personnel and employment practices, already adopted by many employers, are cited as desirable:

1. A centralized personnel department responsible for the mechanics of the employment, transfer, or discharge of workers and for the establishment and maintenance of adequate working conditions.
2. The appointment, where women are employed, of a competent woman as employment executive with responsibility for conditions affecting women especially.
3. Assurance against discrimination either in hiring or on the job because of sex, race, age, or marital status.
4. Establishment of a regular system of promotions with opportunity for women to attain supervisory positions, particularly in departments employing women.
5. Technological changes, where found desirable, to be introduced with all possible effort to safeguard the interests of the workers.
6. Insurance of a steady flow of work; pay for enforced idleness while in the plant.
7. The stabilization of employment throughout the year to prevent seasonal slack periods.
8. Avoidance of speed-up systems characterized by overfatigue and high nervous tension. While efficiency changes that increase the speed of work can be partially compensated for by shorter hours, higher pay, and more frequent rest periods, nothing can restore workers' health burned out by speed-up abuses.

## On Workers and Government

The purpose of government is to serve the welfare of its citizens. Because workers have special needs, they have worked for and secured special laws and special agencies in Federal, State, and local governments to meet these needs. The close cooperation of labor with government is essential if administration of laws and maintenance of standards pertaining to its welfare are to be adequate. Workers should use the agencies of government. They should know clearly what their rights are under labor laws, and what their responsibilities are.

The Women's Bureau in the United States Department of Labor is the particular agency established to serve the interests of women who work, to formulate standards and policies to improve their working conditions, increase their efficiency, and promote their profitable employment. This Bureau acts as a clearing house on all problems and conditions pertaining to women workers. It makes special studies of women's problems and recommends solutions. The Women's Bureau is glad to receive questions about women's work and to reply with the available information. When unable to deal directly with a particular question, the Bureau will refer it to the Federal or State agency best equipped to give the assistance needed.

Detailed information on standards outlined here may be obtained by writing to the Women's Bureau, United States Department of Labor, Washington, D. C.

## REFERENCES

The following list of Women's Bureau publications includes those relating most closely to the subjects covered by the suggested standards. Bulletins may be ordered from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C., at prices listed.

- 87. Sanitary Drinking Facilities With Special Reference to Drinking Fountains. 1931. 10 cents.
- 94. State Requirements for Industrial Lighting: A Handbook for the Protection of Women Workers, Showing Lighting Standards and Practices. 1932. 10 cents.
- 99. The Installation and Maintenance of Toilet Facilities in Places of Employment. 1933. 25 cents.
- 135. The Commercialization of the Home Through Industrial Home Work. 1935. 5 cents.
- 136. The Health and Safety of Women in Industry. 1935. 5 cents.
- 156. State Labor Laws for Women, Part 2. Analysis of Hour Laws for Women Workers. 1938. 10 cents.
- 161. Women at Work. A Century of Industrial Change. 1939. 10 cents.
- 167. State Minimum-Wage Laws and Orders. 1939. 20 cents.
- Short Hours Pay. 1937 (Leaflet).
- The High Cost of Low Wages. 1939 (Leaflet).
- The Woman Worker. Bimonthly periodical. 25 cents a year.

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Issued in 1939

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For sale by the Superintendent of Documents,  
Washington, D. C. - - - Price 5 cents.



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