

# Speaking Up about Safety at the Lobster Factory

Faida Lotika

## BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What do you think the safety issues at a lobster factory might be?
2. Based on the title, what will this article be about?

## I Didn't Want to Risk My Life

Working during the pandemic was hard and stressful for me. I was working at Cozy Harbor Seafood where we process lobster. I had been working there as a picker on an assembly line for seven years when the pandemic started. My job was to take meat out of shells and send it to the cleaners to check.

When my employers required me to come to work during the pandemic, I felt nervous. I didn't want to go to work and to risk my life by possibly exposing myself to Covid.

## Talking to the Boss about Safety

My co-workers felt the same way. We decided to ask our employers how they planned to protect

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us. For example, would they provide masks and hand sanitizer? Would they make it possible for us to keep social distance? We just wanted to be sure that the company would take all necessary measures to ensure workers' safety and protect our lives.

My co-workers and I decided to talk to our employers and ask these questions. So, before our employers arrived, we took some time to talk. We discussed our concerns, and we made a list of

questions to ask them. We worried that maybe the boss would misinterpret our questions. We worried we could get fired from our jobs. In the end, we decided that our questions were important.

My co-workers chose me and Cecelia, my Spanish-speaking friend at work, to talk with our boss. But we didn't go alone. Everybody came with us. When Cecelia and I talked with the boss, my co-workers supported us by nodding their heads. The boss understood that they supported us because he saw them nodding their heads when we were talking. The boss responded by saying that the company would take all necessary measures to prevent the spread of Covid. He said we would keep social distance on the assembly line, wear a mask, get our temperature checked, and use hand sanitizer.

## Workplace Protections

On my first day back at work on March 26, 2020, I could see that the company was taking Covid seriously. Before entering the building, all the workers stayed outside and avoided close contact with each other. The employer required us to wear masks before entering. Also, they checked



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Photo from [Maine Lobstermen's Community Alliance](#), taken by A. Tselikis.

our temperature and provided hand sanitizer. If you didn't have a fever, then you got in the building and punched in, but if you had fever they sent you home. Finally, our employers modified our workplace. They used plastic sheets to create separate spaces. When we worked, each one of us was in a little room. We did not see each other, but we were able to talk to each other. It was the same in our break room. They used plastic to create physical barriers.

Working during the pandemic was not easy. It was stressful because we were constantly afraid of getting Covid at work. However, because of our meeting with the bosses, we got the workplace protections we needed against Covid.

**AFTER YOU READ:**

1. What steps did the workers take to advocate for their safety on the job? Be specific and detailed about what they did.
2. Talk about a time you have advocated for something from your employer.

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