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Our Industry

The private security industry is large, fast-growing, and global. Unfortunately, it is also plagued by high turnover, poor training, and lax oversight--all of which put the public at risk.

Private security is one of the fastest growing occupations in the U.S. There are approximately 1.1 million private security officers working in the United States-- far outnumbering American police officers. Some 600,000 private security officers are outsourced--working for specialized security companies hired by clients to secure their premises.



Just a handful of giant security companies dominate the global market for security. Headquartered in the United Kingdom, Group Four Securicor (G4S) is the world's largest private security company, with more than 585,000 employees in 110 countries worldwide. Sweden-based Securitas, with operations in 40 countries in North America, Europe, Latin America, Asia, Middle East and Africa is the second largest, employing more than 260,000.

In the United States, multinational Securitas is the largest employer, with more than 100,000 officers. The top six security companies in the United States-- Securitas, G4S/Wackenhut, Allied Barton, US Security Associates, Guardsmark and ABM/ACSS--control 44% of market.

Despite the size and wealth of our employers, most security officers are paid poverty wages, have few benefits, and receive minimal training. The average pay for security officers is less than \$23,000 a year.

With such poor working conditions, few security officers stay on the job for long--often resulting in inexperienced, poorly trained officers. A recent report on the private security services industry in the U.S. estimates that annual employee turnover in our industry still exceeds 100 percent for many security companies and can be as high as 300 to 400 percent for low-road firms. These turnover rates rival those of the fast food industry and pose a serious risk to public safety as private security officers often are first responders to life-threatening emergencies.

While employee turnover has fallen somewhat during the current economic crisis, the security industry's "revolving door" approach--which ensures that inexperienced officers struggle to meet the demands of the job--remains a problem. More rigorous training of security officers would prepare officers to better deal with emergency situations, but too often such training does not exist.

Many of our fellow security officers report that they don't receive training, or that training is very superficial. Often, more experienced officers are asked to train new hires during work hours. And when officers are transferred to new buildings, they're not trained on the new building's specific emergency procedures.

Sadly, half of all US states lack any requirement for training for all security officers, and 14 of those require less than three days of general security officer training. But the sad truth is that even if companies put more money into security officer training, the industry's high turnover rates--with officers constantly leaving the profession to pursue other opportunities--would render the investment in training a waste of time and resources.

Despite the size of the security industry and its impact on public safety, in the United States there are few local, state, or federal standards to maintain quality. There are few legal standards to determine who should be able to serve as a security officer and what type of safety training and other skills officers should have. Therefore training is often left in the hands of security contractors who want to keep costs to a minimum and put officers on the job quickly in order to overcome high turnover rates.

Given the wide disparity between states on basic requirements for private security officers, and many have weak rules or no standards at all, our movement to raise standards in the industry is a key factor in keeping the public safe.

Security officer unions help keep the public safe. Unions are a proven way for workers, managers, building owners, and concerned members of the community to come together and find solutions to our industry's problems--resulting in good jobs for our communities and quality security services that the public can count on.

In Europe, where the largest global security companies have their headquarters, many security officers have a union. Security officers there have been able to cooperate with management and public officials to set higher standards for training, screening, oversight, and licensing. In Finland, for example, Securitas worked with Finnish trade unions to set up the Finnish Guard Training Center. In Austria, both Securitas and G4S developed a basic training course and negotiated with their unions to have it inserted in their collective bargaining agreement.

But in the U.S., only 8 percent of private security officers are members of a union. When training is provided to officers, it varies widely--from company to company and building to building. This inconsistency results in a lack of preparedness and a lack of accountability to clients, building tenants, and the public at large.

Our industry needs to raise standards. Wherever our fellow security officers work--whether in commercial office buildings, government facilities, manufacturing sites, or warehouses--we want to be with them, working toward good jobs that keep experienced officers in the profession and working to maximize public safety and protection.

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