

## ★ FEBRUARY HIGHLIGHTS

### Over 50 Safety Issues Captured in February

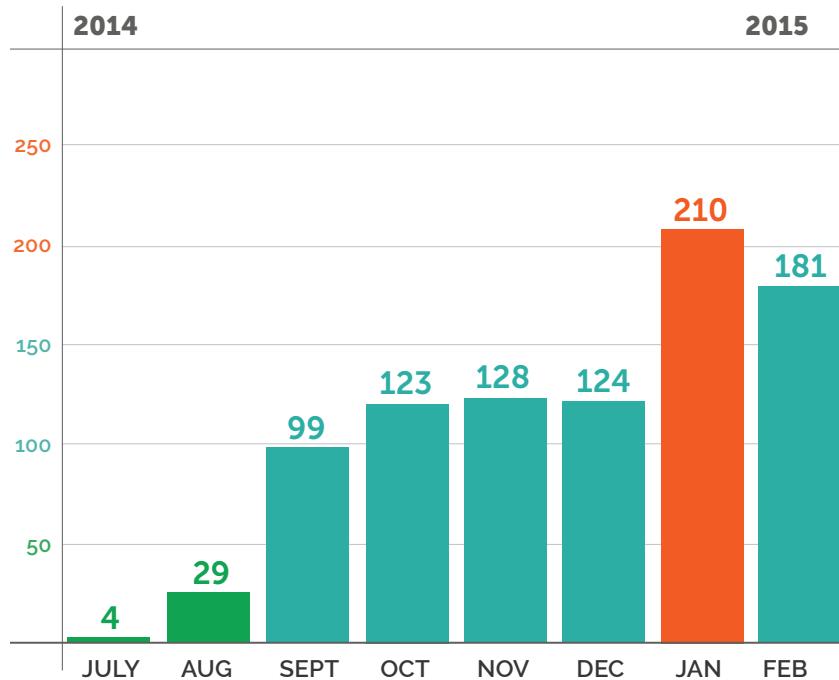
The Helpline received calls about 53 safety issues last month, including active fires, fire danger and occupational safety and health. For an in-depth look at the safety and other issues received, see *A Closer Look* (page 3).

The overall number of substantive issues from workers at Alliance factories was slightly less than the number reported in January and reflected a hiatus in new Helpline training for factories (see *This Month's Findings*, page 2). Retraining is scheduled to start in some factories in March in response to training assessments; the next generation expansion is in the planning stage.

The overall number of workers with access to the Helpline remained the same at 537,214 in 287 factories.

Finally, engaging with workers when concerns are raised is at the heart of any factory management system designed to protect workers from harm. In this month's essay *Effective Grievance Mechanisms: Why Factories Should Care* (see sidebar), the benefits of adopting step-by-step grievance handling processes are discussed.

#### SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES REPORTED TO HELPLINE



Only issues that occurred in Alliance factories are shown.

### EFFECTIVE GRIEVANCE MECHANISMS: Why Factories Should Care

The Amader Kotha Helpline provides factory managers with information about workers' concerns every day. When Helpline information points to an imminent safety risk to people or property, the first priority is always to assess the situation and move quickly to mitigate the risk.

But what about the many cases where workers' concerns may be more challenging to resolve? Take claims of harassment as an example. In addition to being a violation of workplace codes of conduct, if left unchecked harassment—whether it is shouting by supervisors or inappropriate touching—can create an atmosphere where safety or other issues go unreported. What can factory managers do when workers' concerns are complicated, fall outside of clear categories, or do not lend themselves to quick or simple solutions?

In these cases, workers and

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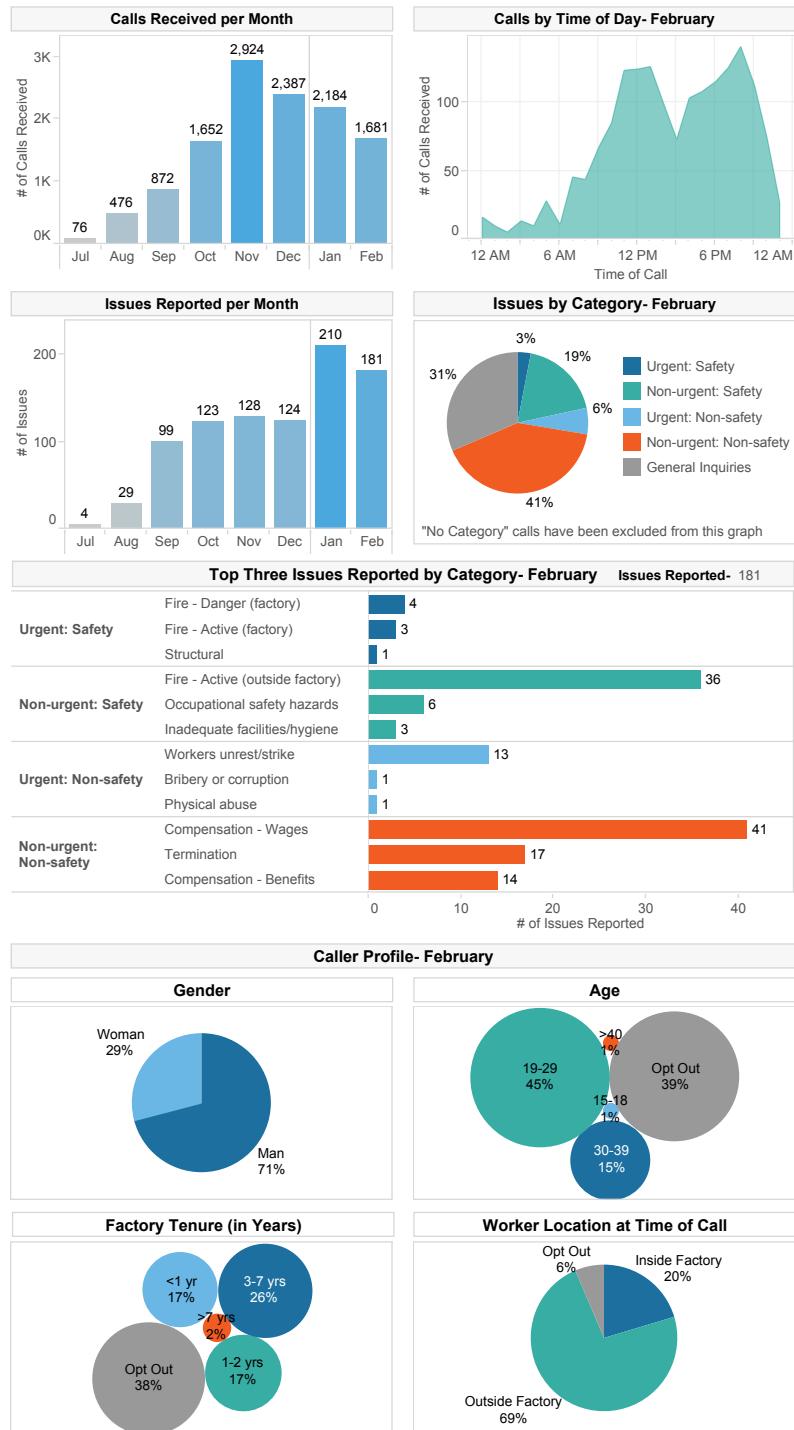
# THIS MONTH'S FINDINGS

## KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- 1,681 calls were placed to Amader Kotha in February** for a total of 12,252 calls received to date. Call volumes are slightly lower than previous months, driven by the fact that Helpline expansion is in hiatus and, therefore, there was a reduction in "test" calls placed to Amader Kotha.
- 181 substantive issues were shared with the Helpline** from workers at Alliance factories in February. The most commonly-reported issues were related to compensation, non-factory fires and termination.
- 24 urgent issues were reported to Amader Kotha this month, 8 of which were related to worker safety.** Several calls were received about a single fire in a factory. The Helpline team followed emergency protocols during the fire incident. We are happy to report no one was injured.
- Workers from 14 non-Alliance factories called the Amader Kotha in February.** Most called to inquire about how the Helpline works, but some dealt with serious issues such as factory fires.
- 97% of all substantive issues captured in February were resolved and closed by the end of the month.** Depending on the issue, Helpline representatives and/or the Alliance staff follow-up with involved parties—including workers, factory managers, public services and others—on all pending issues, through to process resolution.
- 92% of workers who called to report a substantive issue in February were comfortable sharing their name with the Helpline,** but 33% requested that their names not be shared with their factory.
- This month marked a shift in the time of day callers choose to contact the Helpline.** More workers called the Helpline in the evening than in previous months, with calls peaking at 8:00 p.m. This is also connected to the hiatus in Helpline expansion, as fewer workers are calling following training to test the Helpline.

**NOTE:** Detailed call data is provided to the Alliance for distribution to Alliance member companies after factories have had the opportunity to verify and respond to information provided by workers.

Total number of calls may reflect multiple calls about the same issue.



\* Caller Profile data does not include calls from the "General Inquiries," "No Category" or "False" issue categories

## Progress to Date

Provided Access to Helpline	Calls
# workers: 537,214	# calls received: 12,252
factories: 287	# outbound calls: 7,624

The Helpline received calls from 14 factories not listed as Alliance factories in February. These calls are included in the call volume and call time graphs above, but not included in the issue or caller profile visualizations.



## A CLOSER LOOK: Occupational Safety Hazards

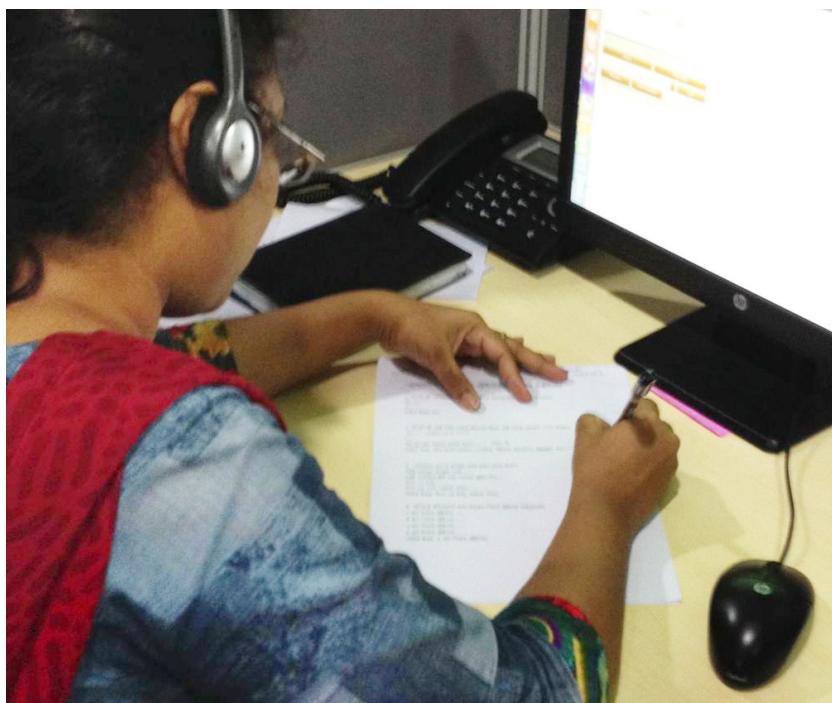
The number of safety-related issues shared with Amader Kotha has stayed fairly consistent over the past three months. However, more calls related to occupational safety and health (OSH) were captured in February than any previous month. And just over half of callers reporting OSH issues contacted the Helpline about their issue first; before/instead of utilizing internal communication mechanisms at their factory. Issues surrounding OSH this month include:

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).** Workers called to report that personal protective equipment was not always available to them or their co-workers when required. One caller said their factory management only distributes PPE during audits and recollects it after auditors leave the factory.

**Noise.** Concerns over distractions and headaches caused by music on the factory floor and loud machinery noise were raised from callers from two factories this month.

**Sanitation.** One worker called about a recurring problem involving worker toilets overflowing into the factory workshop, making it unsafe and uncomfortable for workers to do their jobs.

The Helpline, in liaison with the Alliance, contacted factory administrators about these and other OSH issues as per Amader Kotha protocols. 100% of callers reported that their issue had been resolved by the close of February. Helpline representatives requested that callers contact Amader Kotha again if these problems resurface or others materialize.



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managers can benefit from a grievance process that is viewed as credible by all parties. Amader Kotha can help by getting information to factory managers promptly. But effective grievance processes will be necessary to improve industrial relations over the long term, helping to protect workers against deliberate or unintended harm.

### DEFINING EFFECTIVE GRIEVANCE MECHANISMS

An effective grievance mechanism is defined by the UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights as not only the use of helplines or other in-factory communication channels, but complete processes for identifying, resolving and preventing future grievances that are: legitimate, accessible, predictable, equitable, transparent, rights-compatible, a source of continuous learning and based on engagement and dialogue.

On the surface, it should be relatively simple to declare as a priority the need for improved grievance mechanisms to help ensure a safe workplace, but that is not the case. In other countries across Asia, we have found factory managers sometimes conclude that they will have little need for robust grievance mechanisms since they understand workers needs and are confident they know how to respond to them when problems arise.

### THE DANGER OF UNREPORTED CONCERNs

Just the opposite can be true. We know that unreported concerns—whether they relate to safety or some other issue—pose grave threats to a factory.

Reported concerns can result in big benefits. For example, establishing

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## WHO ARE WE?

Amader Kotha, or “Our Voice” in Bangla, is a unique collaboration among three project partners—Clear Voice, a project of The Cahn Group that operates hotlines and builds effective grievance mechanisms in supply chains; Phulki, a respected civil society organization working to improve the lives of workers and their families in Bangladesh; and Good World Solutions (GWS), a non-profit organization whose flagship tool—Labor Link—has reached over 200,000 workers. Each partner brings years of experience building innovative, best-in-class labor compliance programs in supply chains.



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and implementing effective grievance mechanisms can identify small problems before they become big problems. Managers can better understand issues that were previously hidden or unknown. Worker satisfaction rates can be improved when workers learn that management has responded to issues that have been raised. Operational efficiency can be bolstered when high employee turnover rates and recruitment costs are avoided. Brands and retailers can experience greater rates of compliance with buyer codes of conduct. That's good news for all.

Factory managers can create or expand clear, step-by-step grievance handling processes that are consistent with guidance provided in the UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights. Brands and retailers can help by encouraging these factory-level initiatives. Independent communication channels—like Amader Kotha—can help too by providing trusted and timely information to factory managers and responding back to workers.

In future editions of this publication, we look forward to exploring the specific components of effective grievance mechanisms in factories and how Alliance member companies, factories and the Amader Kotha Helpline can support them.

*-Doug Cahn, Clear Voice*

