The Changing Workplace:
A Challenge for Organizers

In utilities, service van drivers are allowed to take their vans home at night. They receive their dispatch list on an in-truck terminal and they are monitored by a GPS transponder that tracks the location of the van. The workers, therefore, don't know each other, don't feel the connections that are a key basis for collective organizing and are hard to reach out to because they are never or rarely together in one place.

In large office buildings, mail-delivery robots, capable of riding elevators and finding their way through long corridors and locked doors, have eliminated the social connection among departments and offices that was provided by the daily rounds of the "mailroom guy."

In construction, modularization and off-site work are changing the face of the industry. Essentially all of the concrete for the recently built Salt Lake City library was cast in Mexico and shipped by truck to the site for installation. The geographic limitations that used to support construction organizing are being undermined, the "community of interest" among the workers on a building is being dismantled and the insecurity created by management's ability to move the work makes organizing more difficult.

These are only a few examples of the ways that management is reorganizing work processes to give them more control and that increase their profitability. These efforts, embodied in the introduction of new technologies and work restructuring programs, have changed the workplace, and will continue to change the workplace, in ways that organizers need to understand and factor into their organizing strategies.

The key trends that characterize the changing workplace include:

- Standardization/De-Skilling
- Intensification/Lean
- Multi-Skilling/Job Combination/Flexibility
- Automation/New Technologies
- Monitoring and
- Outsourcing/Moving Work

Each of these trends has an impact on the willingness and ability of workers to organize.

Standardized work and de-skilling have the dual impact of making workers feel
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Flexible and long schedules make it more difficult for workers to socialize before and after work and to therefore create the collective that is the basis for organizing.

Automation and new technologies control workers, eliminate jobs, cut down on social interaction and make work moveable. Fear of job loss becomes a significant barrier to