



OFF THE RAILS

Inequality, Insecurity, and Unsafe Conditions at Kawasaki's U.S. Manufacturing Facilities

SEPTEMBER 2025



About Jobs to Move America

Jobs to Move America (JMA) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that uses advocacy and community organizing to transform public spending and corporate behavior. JMA coalitions have partnered with policymakers and communities across the country to ensure that government investment in infrastructure creates good, clean jobs and contributes to building healthy communities for all.

For more than a decade, federal, state and local policymakers have relied on JMA's research to inform their decision-making at the intersection of public procurement and emerging industries. JMA's research team combines rigorous academic standards with on-the-ground fieldwork by local staff. This research focuses on the impact of corporate behavior on workers and communities around the United States. As part of this work, JMA frequently conducts surveys of workers and communities that help illuminate the conditions in and around factories owned by global corporations that receive extensive public subsidies and contracts.

ILR Climate Jobs Institute

About Cornell University's Climate Jobs Institute

The Climate Jobs Institute at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations served as the academic partner for this work, supporting survey instrument development, interview question development, data analysis, and drafting of the Methodology, Sample Profile, Findings, and Are These Good Jobs? sections of the report. CJI is guiding New York's and the nation's transition to a strong, equitable, and resilient clean energy economy by tackling the climate crisis; creating high-quality jobs; confronting race and gender inequality; and building a diverse and inclusive clean energy workforce. Through cutting-edge policy studies, deep relationships with on-the-ground partners, and innovative training and education programs, CJI provides information that policymakers, the labor and environmental movements, industry leaders, and others need to navigate this historic transition to a zero-carbon economy.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since entering the U.S. rolling stock market in the mid-1980s, Japanese company Kawasaki Heavy Industries has received significant tax incentives and public contracts to build railcars for major cities across the country.¹ In 2018,² one of its major clients, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) in New York, awarded the company a \$4.5 billion railcar contract – the largest in its history.³ Although Kawasaki committed to providing good jobs for the duration of the contract,⁴ it has withheld specific details about wages and benefits, citing concerns that such information may “unnecessarily agitate” its workforce.⁵

In the absence of disclosure from Kawasaki, Jobs to Move America, working in partnership with the Climate Jobs Institute at Cornell University, surveyed 180 Kawasaki workers and conducted in-depth interviews with current and former workers to independently assess working conditions at the company’s railcar manufacturing facilities in Nebraska and New York.

In both locations, workers reported low pay, hazardous conditions, and widespread experience of discrimination. Many described a culture that prioritizes speed and profit over safety and well-being, contributing to low morale and serious injuries. Survey data also suggests that Kawasaki relies heavily on temporary workers, who earn less and experience higher rates of turnover than workers hired directly by the company. In manufacturing, the use of temporary labor is associated with lower product quality and longer production times,⁶ concerns that align with reports of staffing issues and delays on Kawasaki’s recent MTA contracts.⁷

Overall, the findings indicate that Kawasaki’s U.S. manufacturing jobs fall significantly short of the commonly accepted definition of a “good job,” raising questions about the public return on investment in subsidized manufacturing.

KEY FINDINGS

Researchers at Jobs to Move America and the Climate Jobs Institute at Cornell University surveyed and interviewed Kawasaki workers at two locations over a period of a year – May 2024 to May 2025. A total of 180 Kawasaki workers were surveyed and data analysis identified the following:

► Pay Inequities

1. Surveyed women earned **\$3.49 less** per hour on average than surveyed men.
2. Temporary workers hired through staffing agencies represented over half of survey respondents and earned **\$4.66 less** per hour on average than workers directly hired through Kawasaki.
3. Surveyed Kawasaki workers were **paid approximately 16% below average hourly wages in the same industry.**⁸
4. 92% of workers reported **struggling to afford at least one basic living expense** and 76% reported struggling with all expenses.

► Unsafe Working Conditions

1. Workers reported **witnessing a coworker get injured** (40%) or being **injured themselves** (17%) at their worksite.
2. Workers noted hazardous and overheated environments, including **heavy lifting, loud machinery, poor ventilation, and faulty equipment.**

► Widespread Experience of Discrimination

1. Half of workers reported **witnessing unfair treatment based on race** (24%), **gender** (24%), **immigration status** (10%), and other protected categories.
2. Workers reported earning less money than someone doing the same job (33%), having to work harder than their colleagues to get the same recognition (27%), being treated as if they were not competent (21%), and being unfairly denied a promotion (19%). Of respondents who reported these experiences, the most frequently cited bases were **race** (19%), **gender** (12%), and **arrest/conviction record** (6%).

► Toxic Workplace Culture

1. Workers reported witnessing supervisors use **slurs or derogatory language about a group of people** (16%) and **make offensive comments or jokes** (27%) in the workplace.
2. 18% of workers reported being **instructed by a supervisor not to discuss their pay with others.**
3. Workers described a culture marked by **poor management, disrespect, and an emphasis on production speed over employee well-being.**

INTRODUCTION

Manufacturing in the United States has been experiencing a resurgence that is projected to continue for at least the next decade.⁹ While many Americans continue to associate manufacturing jobs with economic prosperity and upward mobility, the reality is more complex. Today's manufacturing jobs offer lower wages and more precarious employment than they did in the past.¹⁰

This report examines job quality and working conditions in Kawasaki Heavy Industries' U.S.-based railcar manufacturing facilities. Kawasaki, one of the first Japanese companies to open a factory in the United States, is a multinational manufacturer of industrial machinery with railcar production sites in Yonkers, New York and Lincoln, Nebraska.¹¹ Since entering the U.S. rolling stock market in 1980, the company has received millions of dollars in tax incentives and billions of dollars in government contracts to produce railcars for major cities like Philadelphia, Boston, and New York City.¹² The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) in New York is its number one customer.¹³

In 2018, the MTA tapped Kawasaki to manufacture new state-of-the-art R211 railcars for its New York City Transit and Staten Island Railway subway lines.¹⁴ At \$4.5 billion, this contract is now the company's largest ever,¹⁵ funded through the MTA Capital Plan and the Federal Transit Administration.¹⁶ As a condition of the contract, the MTA asked Kawasaki to submit a U.S. Employment Plan (USEP) – a supplementary worksheet detailing the number, type, and location of jobs the company will create and retain, as well as salaries, benefits, and plans for recruitment and training.¹⁷ In their submission, Kawasaki and its suppliers committed to retaining over 450 U.S. jobs with a total wage and benefits value of more than \$270 million over the life of the contract.¹⁸

Yet, despite multiple Freedom of Information requests, the company has not made public its full USEP worksheet – including specific details about the wages and benefits it is paying – or any documents to indicate compliance with the policy and its contract. In a February 2024 affidavit submitted to the New York Supreme Court, Kawasaki's Manager of Contracts/Marketing stated:

[Kawasaki] has been fortunate to have been able to maintain a cooperative, respectful and mutually beneficial relationship with its workforce, which has not felt a need to unionize in more than 40 years. [Kawasaki] views its historically good relationship with labor as an important factor contributing to its competitiveness in the market, and believes that public disclosure of the confidential information in [Kawasaki's] R211 USEP reports may unnecessarily agitate [Kawasaki's] workforce, which could only make [Kawasaki] less competitive in the carbuilding industry.¹⁹

To determine whether the company is actually creating good jobs, Jobs to Move America partnered with the Climate Jobs Institute at Cornell University to survey 180 Kawasaki workers and conduct interviews with current and former workers at both facilities.

Findings from this research reveal low pay, hazardous conditions, and widespread experience of discrimination. Many workers described a culture that prioritizes speed and profit over their safety and well-being, contributing to low morale and serious injuries. The data also highlight Kawasaki's reliance on temporary workers ("temps"), who comprised just over half of survey respondents. By definition, temps are hired for short-term work, with high turnover expected. However, significant wage gaps between surveyed temps and direct hires, combined with the analysis that more than a quarter of surveyed temps remained on the job for over two years, indicate that Kawasaki does not use temp labor as interim support but as a long-term cost-cutting strategy. The result is a two-tiered employment structure that can worsen product quality and lengthen production times.²⁰ By situating real worker experiences within the broader context of job quality and manufacturing employment research, this report underscores a critical truth - manufacturing jobs alone do not guarantee economic prosperity. Only by holding manufacturers accountable to the public that funds them, the workers who power them, and the communities that support them can we create an economy that delivers for everyone.



*The first set of Kawasaki R-211S rail cars makes a stop at Bay Terrace station in Staten Island during its inaugural round trip.
Credit: EmperorOfNYC via Wikimedia Commons*

MANUFACTURING JOBS REIMAGINED

Many Americans continue to view the manufacturing sector as a source of stable, dignified employment.²¹ However, over the past several decades, the quality of these jobs eroded as corporations offshored production and increasingly relied on temporary staffing agencies.²² Between 1979 and 2019, U.S. manufacturing employment fell by 35%.²³ Around the same period, the wage premium once associated with manufacturing shrunk from 14% to 7%, and the benefits premium declined from 20% in 2004 to 10% in 2019.²⁴

Although manufacturing employment has been steadily climbing since the Great Recession – bolstered by government subsidies – most new jobs are non-union and offer lower pay than historically provided.²⁵ Evidence shows a link between this decline in job quality and the industry's growing dependence on temporary workers. Manufacturers often use a temporary workforce to reduce labor costs, particularly the costs associated with hiring and firing workers as production demands fluctuate.²⁶ Temporary workers (“temps”) are not directly employed by the manufacturers, but hired through third-party staffing agencies, and therefore do not receive the same wages, benefits, or protections as directly hired workers.²⁷ Because the Bureau of Labor Statistics tracks their wages and injury data separately, temps’ experiences are excluded from official industry metrics.²⁸ Consequently, manufacturing jobs, especially at facilities heavily reliant on temporary labor, may be even lower quality than publicly reported.

In recent years, public investments have aimed to encourage the creation of quality, equitable jobs in domestic manufacturing.²⁹ While many “good jobs” policies target emerging industries like battery and semiconductor production, similar approaches have been applied to legacy sectors, such as transit manufacturers, which are often subsidized by government contracts. For instance, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority implemented a Manufacturing Careers Policy mandating that companies bidding for contracts exceeding \$50 million submit a U.S. Employment Plan (USEP) committing to fair wages, training or apprenticeship programs, and employment opportunities for disadvantaged workers.³⁰ The USEP has also been voluntarily adopted by transit agencies including the Chicago Transit Authority and Amtrak.³¹

In 2018, the MTA in New York attached a USEP to its \$4.5 billion contract with Kawasaki, wherein the company committed to providing high quality jobs at both of its U.S. railcar manufacturing facilities.³² Kawasaki is required to submit semi-annual progress reports for four years, and the MTA reserves the right to collect liquidated damages in the event of noncompliance.³³ When enforced effectively, policies like the USEP empower public agencies to raise employment standards among contracting firms and ensure that public dollars are spent responsibly.

COMPANY PROFILE

Kawasaki Heavy Industries is a multinational manufacturer of industrial machinery headquartered in Japan. Established as a shipyard in 1878, today it manufactures various forms of transportation including submarines, locomotives, fighter jets, helicopters, and motorcycles for commercial and government clients worldwide.³⁴

Through its rolling stock subsidiary, Kawasaki Railcar Manufacturing Co., Ltd., the company operates railcar production bases in Yonkers, New York and Lincoln, Nebraska.³⁵ Its New York facility was established in 1986 and employs over 400 workers at peak production.³⁶ In 2001, Kawasaki added a railcar division to its consumer products facility in Nebraska, which was established in 1974.³⁷ Today, the entire facility employs 2,200 direct hire workers and 500 temporary workers³⁸ – the railcar division accounts for about 500 of these workers.³⁹

Government Incentives

Kawasaki has received substantial public subsidies for its U.S. operations. When the company opened its New York facility in the mid-1980s, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey provided a \$2 million test track, a 10-year exemption from property taxes and water charges, and a 70% discount on electricity expenses.⁴⁰ Additionally, the New York State Industrial Development Agency issued a \$4.5 million industrial revenue bond to fund the project and the City of Yonkers subsidized half the salaries of 27 local workers. More recently, Empire State Development gave Kawasaki a \$500,000 capital grant to purchase and renovate its New York facility,⁴¹ as well as \$3.9 million in tax credits through the Empire Zones program.⁴² The Nebraska facility has also received over \$7 million in tax rebates from the state's Department of Revenue since 2018.⁴³

In total, Kawasaki has secured billions of dollars in U.S. transit contracts – at least \$7 billion over two decades – funded by taxpayers and transit users.⁴⁴



M9 shells sit at the Kawasaki assembly plant in Yonkers in May 2021. Credit: David Wilson via Wikimedia Commons

Production Issues

Over the last couple of decades, multiple Kawasaki railcar contracts have suffered from costly delays and serious issues and defects. Problems first surfaced during production of the M-8 railcar – a \$760.3 million contract with MTA affiliate Metro-North Railroad and the Connecticut Department of Transportation.⁴⁵ Originally slated for delivery in late 2009, issues during initial tests kept the cars out of service until March 2011.⁴⁶ A WABC-TV investigation found that Kawasaki made at least fourteen different written requests for deadline extensions in 2010, which a representative from the Connecticut Metro-North Commuter Council called “excuses for other problems” and “a betrayal in public faith.”⁴⁷

Around the same time, Kawasaki won a \$1.46 billion contract with Washington Metro (WMATA) in D.C. to replace the agency’s aging fleets with new 7000-series railcars.⁴⁸ By 2016, production delays had become so severe that a congressional delegation intervened to pressure the company to remain on schedule.⁴⁹ In 2018, an internal review uncovered widespread defects in the wiring installation, prompting WMATA to pull all 548 railcars out of service for a year-long rewiring process.⁵⁰ A Kawasaki management presentation cited “work procedures and training” as the cause of the problem.⁵¹ The problems persisted: in 2021, the cars were removed from service again after a derailment revealed a chronic wheel defect and forced WMATA to spend \$55 million over three years to re-press the wheels of the entire fleet.⁵²

In 2022, MTA affiliate Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) came under scrutiny for its \$724 million M-9 railcar contract with Kawasaki, which fell nearly three years behind schedule and ran \$8.9 million over budget.⁵³ In an audit by the New York State Comptroller’s Office, LIRR officials noted that Kawasaki contributed to delays and cost overruns through “inadequate training” and poor quality assurance oversight at its Nebraska facility, “ineffective inspections” that failed to catch defects before delivery, and “inadequate staffing” at its New York facility.⁵⁴ The audit documented over 9,000 defects in the delivered railcars, entitling LIRR to \$5.5 million in liquidated damages. The final M-9 cars were not delivered until April 2024 – almost 5 years late.⁵⁵

“What we’re trying to do is help Kawasaki get back on the straight and narrow.”

– Janno Lieber, Chair and CEO of the MTA⁵⁶

Unfortunately, Kawasaki seems to be encountering similar problems with the R211 railcar, its most recent and largest MTA contract valued at \$4.5 billion.⁵⁷ Following initial delays during the COVID-19 pandemic,⁵⁸ the company fell behind schedule again in 2022, when high turnover and alleged mismanagement at its Nebraska facility prompted MTA officials to implement “constant oversight and supervision” of production.⁵⁹ At the time, Kawasaki was losing 45 employees per month out of a 430-person workforce – an annual turnover rate of about 125%. Since the first R211s entered service in March 2023, the cars have been pulled from operation twice: first in October 2023 due to faulty gearboxes,⁶⁰ and again in November 2024 due to signaling system issues.⁶¹

METHODOLOGY

To evaluate working conditions at Kawasaki's U.S. railcar production facilities, researchers from Jobs to Move America and the Climate Jobs Institute at Cornell University conducted a survey and in-depth interviews between May 2024 and May 2025. A total of 180 workers from both locations participated in the survey. Due to differences in facility sizes – 2,700 workers in Nebraska compared to 400 in New York – the Nebraska facility accounted for 139 respondents (77%), while 41 respondents (23%) came from the New York facility. Given the small size of the New York sample, these results are not considered representative or generalizable for that location.

The survey targeted both temporary and direct hire workers. While outreach in Nebraska focused on the railcar division, the structure of the facility led to participation from both railcar and consumer products divisions. Additionally, a small number of former workers completed the survey. These former workers were included in the follow-up interviews to provide broader context.

To recruit participants, the research team distributed QR code flyers outside of the main production facilities in Nebraska and New York, as well as at MTA maintenance sites across New York City, where Kawasaki workers are often placed. In Nebraska, local organizations and community members helped distribute the survey to Kawasaki workers who were non-English speakers or formerly incarcerated.

Participants who completed a valid survey received a \$25 gift card. To encourage snowball sampling, respondents were offered an additional \$10 gift card for each valid referral.

Quality control protocols were implemented both before and after survey completion to ensure data authenticity. These included three mandatory screening questions confirming participant eligibility and built-in software controls designed to automatically identify partial or duplicate submissions. Responses not flagged automatically underwent manual verification, removing entries with duplicate email addresses, suspicious IP addresses, or illogical responses, thereby reinforcing response validity.

Between January 2025 and May 2025, the research team conducted interviews with three current and five former Kawasaki workers. Interview participants were selected primarily based on survey responses, particularly those who responded affirmatively that they were willing to share more about their experiences.

Data Analysis

To analyze the survey data, researchers utilized Stata statistical software (version 19.5). Data were cross-tabulated to identify overall patterns and compare results across different groups (e.g., men versus women; Nebraska versus New York respondents). Statistical significance tests were conducted to determine whether the differences between groups are likely to reflect characteristics of the broader population, rather than just random variation in the sample. The threshold for statistical significance was set at $P \leq .05$ (95% confidence), consistent with standard research practice. Results with P-values between $.05 \leq X \leq .055$ are noted as “marginally significant,” as they fall just above the conventional cutoff but may still warrant interpretation.

Statistical tests were selected based on the type of data: nominal data (e.g., yes/no) were tested using Pearson's chi-square and Fisher's exact test; ordinal data (e.g., financial insecurity and related indices) were analyzed using Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests; and interval items (e.g., wages, hours) were evaluated using t-tests.

Qualitative data were collected through both open-ended questions included in the survey instrument and through the aforementioned series of semi-structured interviews with eight current and former workers conducted by the research team – five based at the Nebraska location and three based at the New York location. All interview subjects had been employed at Kawasaki within the last five years. These interviews were audio recorded and transcribed after receiving consent from each subject. Respondents and interviewees were anonymized to protect their privacy.

Qualitative data were analyzed using an applied thematic analysis approach. Meta themes were identified largely in congruence with the core categories used to determine job quality based on this paper's theoretical framework, with some larger categories such as "working conditions" being broken up into component parts. These meta themes included perceptions of the job, pay, benefits, working conditions, health and safety, discrimination, harassment and reporting, work culture, advancement, and training. In addition, due to this report's interest in the interaction between temporary workers or "temps," job quality, and product quality, an additional meta theme – treatment of temps – was identified and added to analysis. Data coding was conducted using MAXQDA 24. Intercooder agreement was achieved using the subjective assessment approach.



A set of R211A subway cars is terminated at Court Square station. Credit: EmperorOfNYC via Wikimedia Commons

SAMPLE PROFILE

In order to contextualize the survey findings, demographic and employment profiles of Kawasaki's surveyed workforce are provided. The demographic profile includes data on age, racial, and gender composition, while the employment profile includes data on employment status, worker status, and employment tenure. The term "employment status" indicates part-time employment (working less than 40 hours) or full-time employment (working 40 hours or more) at Kawasaki, while the term "worker status" refers to whether a worker was hired directly by Kawasaki (direct hire) or through a temporary staffing agency (temp). In addition to aggregate data, each table provides comparative breakdowns by two key dimensions: location and worker status. These disaggregated profiles support the study's objective of analyzing Kawasaki's use of temporary labor by highlighting the similarities and differences between temps and direct hires. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. For some demographic questions, respondents were given the option not to answer or disclose this information - these responses are not included in the table.

Table 1: Survey Sample Demographics by Location & Worker Status

Demographic	Whole Sample	Nebraska	New York	Direct Hire	Temp
Sample Size	180	139	41	89	91
Top 4 Modal/Most Frequently Selected Age Categories					
18-24 years old	22% 40 respondents	27%	7%	21%	23%
25-34 years old	30% 54 respondents	28%	37%	29%	31%
35-44 years old	28% 51 respondents	28%	29%	24%	33%
45-54 years old	12% 21 respondents	11%	15%	16%	8%
Race & Ethnicity⁶²					
White	35% 60 respondents	41%	14%	33%	36%
Black	22% 37 respondents	17%	38%	22%	21%
Non-White Hispanic	16% 27 respondents	12%	30%	12%	19%
Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI)	5% 9 respondents	6%	3%	6%	4%
Other	23% 39 respondents	24%	16%	26%	20%
Gender					
Male	65% 116 respondents	57%	90%	64%	52%
Female	23% 56 respondents	38%	7%	21%	35%
Transgender Female	2% 3 respondents	2%	-	1%	2%
Nonbinary/Third Gender	2% 4 respondents	2%	2%	2%	2%

Table 2. Survey Sample Employment Characteristics by Location & Worker Status

Demographic	Whole Sample	Nebraska	New York	Direct Hire	Temp
Employment Status					
Part-time	3% 5 respondents	4%	–	1%	4%
Full-time	94% 170 respondents	93%	100%	98%	91%
Other	3% 5 respondents	4%	–	1%	4%
Worker Status					
Direct Hire	49% 89 respondents	42%	73%	–	–
Temp	51% 91 respondents	58%	27%	–	–
Top 6 Modal/Most Frequently Selected Years Worked for Employer Categories					
<1 year	30% 48 respondents	36%	11%	16%	45%
1 - < 2 years	22% 35 respondents	25%	11%	18%	26%
2 - < 3 years	17% 28 respondents	18%	14%	22%	13%
3 - < 5 years	12% 20 respondents	10%	20%	18%	6%
5 - < 10 years	8% 13 respondents	7%	11%	10%	6%
10 - < 20 years	8% 12 respondents	3%	23%	11%	4%

Location

Surveyed workforces at the two Kawasaki railcar manufacturing facilities were composed of majority workers between the ages of 25 and 44 (56% in Nebraska, 66% in New York) and more than 90% were employed full-time.

Racial and gender compositions differed substantially between locations. In Nebraska, White workers represented the largest racial group among surveyed workers (41%), while in New York, Black workers were most common (38%). Only 14% of respondents at the New York location identified as White. Male respondents comprised the majority at both sites, though gender diversity varied: 42% of respondents in Nebraska identified as female, transgender female, or nonbinary/third gender, compared to only 10% in New York.⁶³

Worker status distribution also diverged by location. In Nebraska, the majority of respondents were temps (58%), while in New York, the majority were direct hires (73%). Employment tenure followed similar patterns. In Nebraska, 79% of respondents reported working three years or less, with one year or less being the most frequently selected category. By contrast, at the New York facility, the majority of respondents were employed for more than three years, with 10-<20 years being the most frequently selected category (23%). The differences in employment tenure patterns likely correspond to differences in the proportion of temps and direct hires at each location.

Worker Status

When comparing direct hires and temps, age distribution and employment status were broadly similar across both locations: 64% of temps and 53% of direct hires were between the ages of 25 and 44, and over 90% of each group held full-time positions.

BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), or non-white individuals, were similarly represented among both groups, with 66% of direct hires and 64% of temps identifying as non-white. Gender composition differed more sharply. Men constituted a larger share of direct hires (64%) than temps (52%), while women constituted a larger share of temps (35%) than direct hires (21%).

Tenure data highlighted an expected but significant divide. Temps were more likely to report shorter tenures, with 45% having worked at Kawasaki for one year or less, compared to 16% of direct hires. Overall, 71% of temps reported employment of two years or less, compared to only 34% of direct hires.



A worker welds on a gray metal sheet. Credit: Danial Abdullah via Pexels

FINDINGS

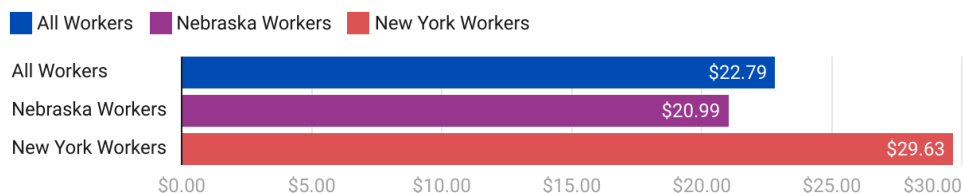
A 2020 report from the Urban Institute (Congdon et al.) defines job quality according to five categories: pay, benefits, working conditions, business culture and job design, and on-the-job skill development.⁶⁴ In the following sections, findings from the survey and interview data are presented according to this framework, with pay and benefits being consolidated into a broader “compensation” category. Each dimension is examined across the full sample and, where possible, disaggregated by location, worker status, race/ethnicity, and gender. The term BIPOC is used to refer to non-white workers in aggregate, and the term “temp” is used interchangeably with “temporary worker.” Findings described as statistically significant have undergone testing and are determined unlikely to have occurred by random chance, suggesting a meaningful effect or difference.

Compensation

Wages

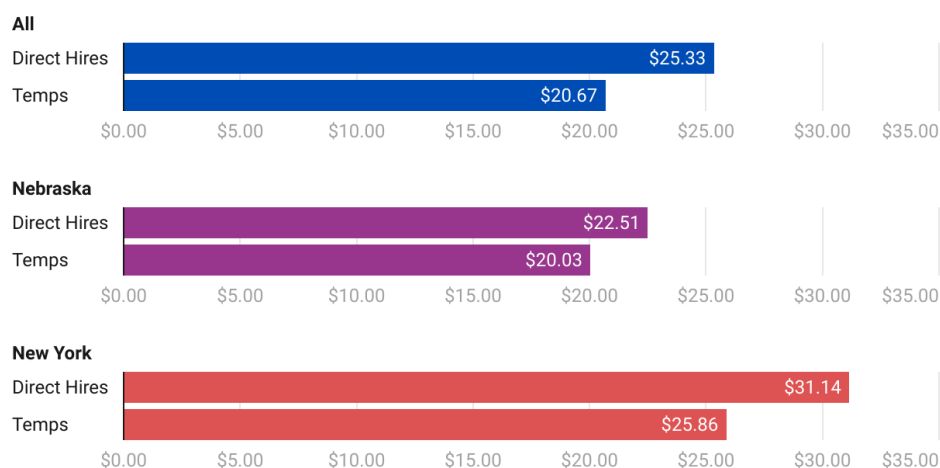
Across the full sample, the average (mean) hourly wage was \$22.79. Workers in Nebraska reported significantly lower average hourly wages (\$20.99) than workers in New York (\$29.63).⁶⁵

Respondents' Average Hourly Pay Rate by Location



Wages also differed substantially by worker status. The average hourly wage for direct hires was \$25.33, nearly \$5.00 higher than the average for temporary workers (\$20.67). This difference was statistically significant,⁶⁶ indicating that surveyed direct hires were consistently paid more than surveyed temps across both facilities. These disparities persisted when disaggregated by location. In Nebraska, surveyed direct hires were paid \$22.51/hour on average, compared to \$20.03/hour for temps – a statistically significant gap.⁶⁷ In New York, surveyed direct hires were paid \$31.14/hour compared to \$25.86/hour for temps.

Respondents' Average Hourly Pay Rate by Location and Worker Status



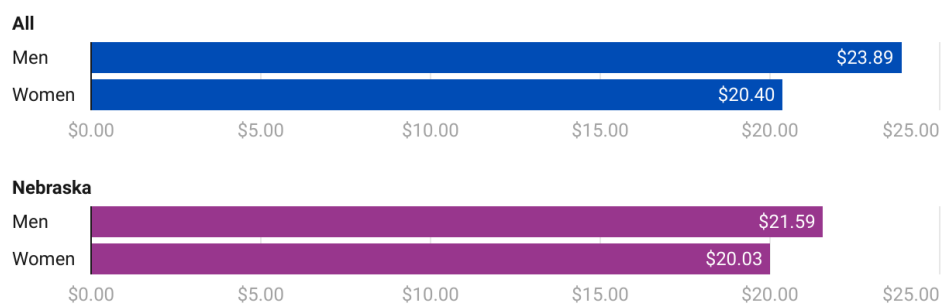
BIPOC workers reported an average hourly wage of \$23.51, roughly \$2.00 higher than that of White workers. However, the difference in pay between White and BIPOC workers was only marginally significant,⁶⁸ and may be due to the higher concentration of Black and Non-White Hispanic workers in the New York sample, where wages were significantly higher overall. When isolating the Nebraska data, White workers earned slightly more than BIPOC workers, with average hourly rates of \$21.02 and \$20.96, respectively.



A worker on a forklift. Credit: Pexels

Analysis of pay by gender revealed statistically significant differences.⁶⁹ Men reported an average hourly wage of \$23.89, compared to \$20.40 for women.⁷⁰ As with wages by worker status, results were further disaggregated by location. In Nebraska, a statistically significant gender-based wage gap emerged: Women were paid an average of \$1.56/hour less than men.⁷¹ Also of note is the maximum wage reported for women. While men in Nebraska reported hourly wages ranging from \$11.75 to \$30.87, women's wages capped out much lower, ranging from \$15.00 to \$25.00. Due to small subsample sizes, wage analysis could not be conducted for New York respondents by gender, nor for non-cisgender respondents in either location.

Respondents' Average Hourly Pay Rate by Gender



Additional Forms of Pay

A majority of respondents (88%) reported receiving overtime pay. Smaller shares reported receiving bonus pay for company performance (9%), hazard pay (7%), bonus pay for individual performance (7%), and bonus pay for worksite performance (4%).

While there were no statistically significant differences by location or worker status, BIPOC workers and women were more likely to report receiving hazard pay,⁷² women were more likely to report receiving bonus pay for individual performance and men were more likely to report receiving bonus pay for company performance.⁷³

Benefits

Based on qualitative analysis,⁷⁴ workers had mixed perceptions of their employee benefits, varying by location, worker status, and tenure. In New York, direct hires reported access to health insurance, dental insurance, 401k, and paid leave (e.g. personal days, sick days, and vacation days that increase with seniority). However, New York workers also reported that temps did not receive vacation benefits until they were directly hired by the company.

In contrast, nearly all Nebraska workers who discussed their benefits described them as inadequate. Direct hires acknowledged having paid time off and health insurance, though one interviewee noted that the latter had gotten worse over time. What is most clear from the data is the disparity in benefits between temps and direct hires. Temps, whose benefits are administered by staffing agencies, report expensive or nonexistent healthcare options and limited or no paid time off. Several Nebraska temps reported not receiving paid time off during routine plant shutdowns in the summer and the winter, unlike their direct hire colleagues.

Financial Security

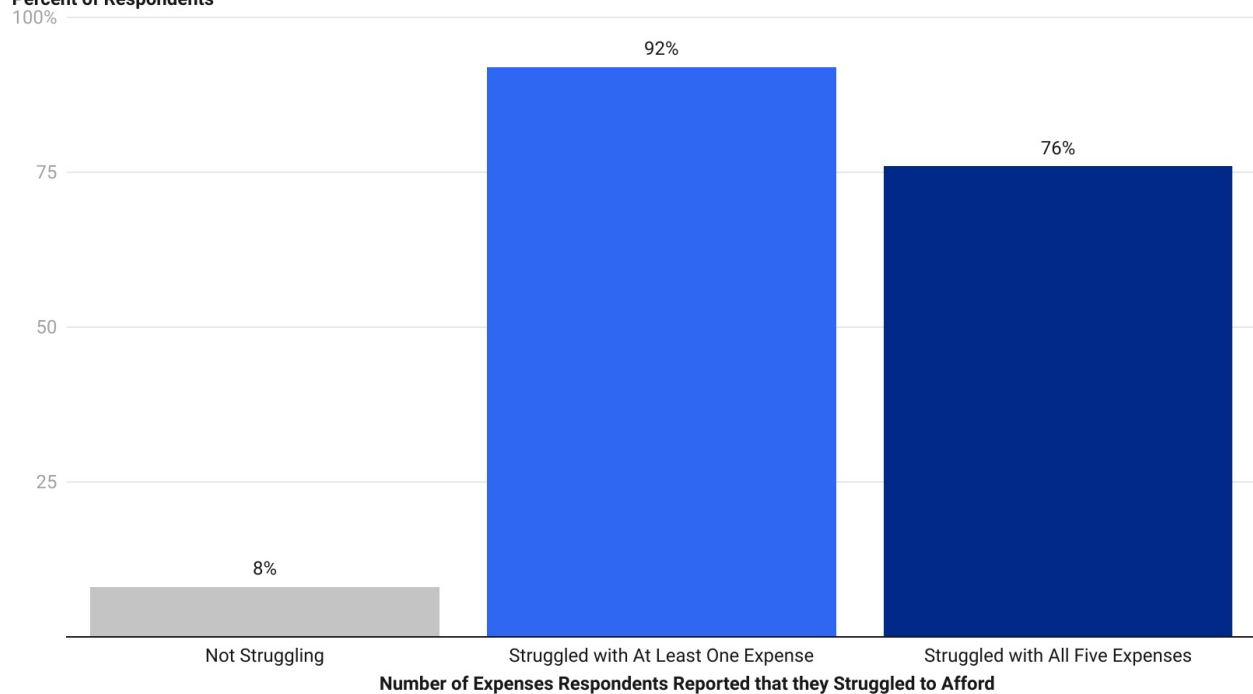
Financial insecurity of respondents was measured by asking respondents whether they struggled “always, often, sometimes, rarely, or never” with a series of five everyday household expenditures: mortgage or rent, groceries, utility bills, transportation, and medical care. These expenditure variables were collapsed into two indices:

1. General Financial Insecurity Index: Respondents reported struggling at any frequency to afford one or more expenses, up to all five.
2. Severe Financial Insecurity Index: Respondents reported “often” or “always” struggling to afford one or more expenses, up to all five.

Financial Insecurity of Respondents

Percent of respondents that struggle to pay for everyday household expenditures: mortgage/rent, groceries, utility bills, transportation costs, and medical costs.

Percent of Respondents

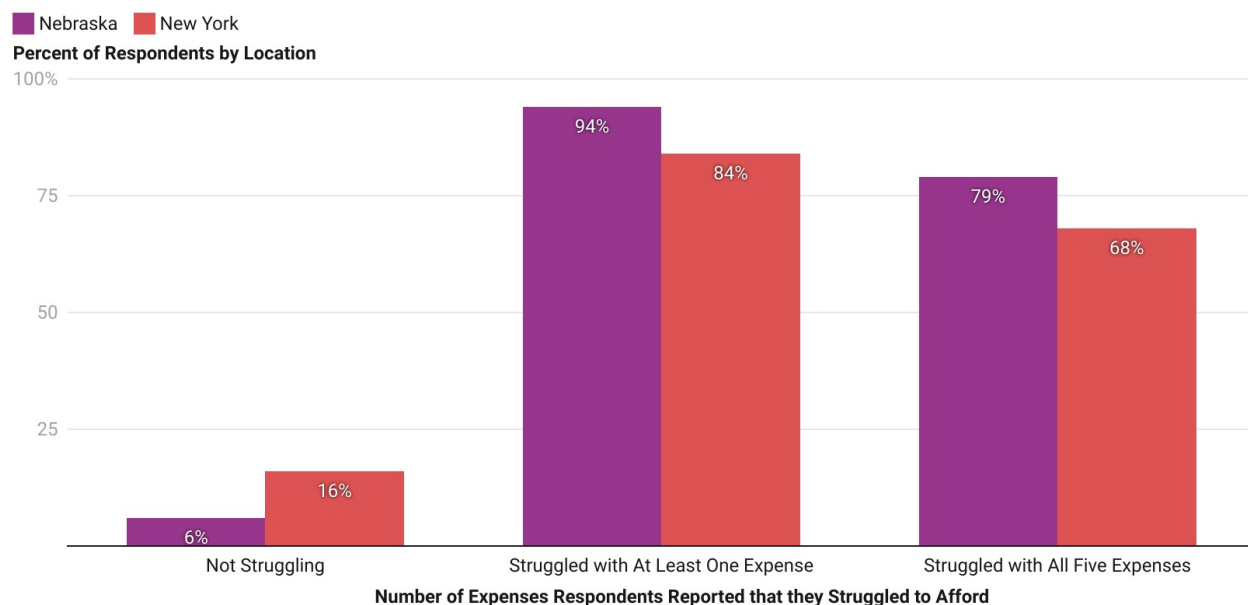


Analysis showed 92% of all respondents reported struggling to pay at least one expense and 76% reported struggling with all expenses. Only 8% of respondents reported they did not struggle to pay any expenses. When measuring severity, 60% of respondents reported struggling often or always to pay at least one basic living expense and 17% with all expenses.

Workers from both the Nebraska and New York facilities reported high rates of financial insecurity, with a majority of workers indicating that they had some degree of struggle paying for all expenses. In Nebraska, 94% of respondents indicated struggling with at least one expense and 79% of respondents indicated that they struggled with all expenses. In New York, 84% of respondents indicated struggling with at least one expense and 68% of respondents reported struggling with all expenses. Of note is the gap between Nebraska workers and New York workers who reported severe financial insecurity: While 14% of Nebrasakan respondents reported severe struggle across all expenses, nearly double the proportion of New York respondents reported the same (27%).

Financial Insecurity of Respondents by Location

Percent of respondents in each location (Nebraska, New York) that struggle to pay for everyday household expenditures: mortgage/rent, groceries, utility bills, transportation costs, and medical costs.



Both temp workers and direct hires reported similarly high rates of financial insecurity, with temp workers exhibiting slightly higher rates: 94% of temp workers indicated some degree of struggle with at least one expense, while 89% of direct hires reported the same. 76% of temp workers indicated some level of struggle with all expenses versus 77% of direct workers. When examining the financial insecurity of workers by status in each location, this pattern largely holds for Nebraska respondents: 95% of direct hires and 94% of temps reported some level of struggle with at least one expense, while 83% of direct hires and 76% of temps reported some level of struggle with all expenses. However, New York workers showed key differences in financial insecurity by worker status: 80% of temps reported struggling with all indicators compared to 64% of direct hires. Additionally, 21% of direct hires reported never struggling to afford all expenses, while no temp workers were able to do so.

When analyzing financial insecurity by race/ethnicity, BIPOC workers were significantly more likely to have a higher index of both financial insecurity and severe financial insecurity than their White counterparts.⁷⁵ Workers classed as Other had the highest rate of struggle with all expenses (95%), followed by AAPI respondents (89%), Black respondents (77%), White respondents (71%), and finally, Non-White Hispanic respondents (65%). Looking at the severe financial insecurity index, Other respondents once again rank first in reporting severe struggle with all expenses (28%), followed by Black respondents (17%), non-White Hispanic respondents (15%), and finally, AAPI and White respondents (11%). Most groups of BIPOC workers were also significantly more likely to report struggling with utility bills, transportation costs, and medical costs.⁷⁶

Looking at combined a BIPOC category for the Nebraska location, the racial/ethnic differences in financial security become even more pronounced: 69% of White respondents reported some difficulty in affording all expenses versus 85% of BIPOC respondents, a statistically significant difference.⁷⁷ Additionally, 9% of White respondents reported severe struggle with all expenses compared to 17% of BIPOC respondents, another statistically significant gap.⁷⁸ Broken down by expense, BIPOC respondents in Nebraska were statistically more likely to report struggling to afford mortgage/rent, utility bills, transportation costs, and medical expenses than White respondents.⁷⁹

Across the entire sample, women reported higher rates of financial insecurity than men. 86% of women indicated some degree of struggle with all expenses versus 72% of men, and 21% of women reported severe struggle with all expenses versus 16% of men. At least 45% of women reported struggling often or always with four of the five expenses: mortgage/rent (45%), groceries (54%), utility bills (45%), and transportation costs (46%). Meanwhile, men report demonstrably lower rates of often or always being able to afford expenses, only climbing above 40% in one category: groceries (41%).

Survey findings on low wages and financial stress were reinforced by qualitative analysis. Workers frequently described insufficient pay and difficulty covering expenses, with one worker stating, **"Cost of living continuously goes up exponentially more than the cost of living increase provided by [Kawasaki]."**

Additionally, workers reported that their wages often did not match the roles that they were being asked to take on outside of their formal job scope – such as training other workers or making supervisory decisions. Workers made comments such as, **"[O]bviously, I need to be paid more for the work that I do. I mean, it's not like it's just a nine to five and I go home. I work nights, I work days, occasionally I work weekends. I'm on call every other Saturday,"** while another said, **"[I]n reality the pay is subpar for the work you're forced to do!"** Some workers also noted that raises were either low, infrequent, or non-existent.

Working Conditions

The dimension of working conditions is measured by hours, job security, safety, and (non)discrimination. On the whole, survey and interview responses characterized conditions at Kawasaki as poor. Common descriptors included **"miserable," "depressing,"** and **"demoralizing."** One worker noted, **"[It] feels kinda like a prison or that you're disposable."** Another worker recounted, **"It's just so much all the time, just mentally exhausting, physically exhausting, just that constant repetition and the heat and all the physical exertion and all the constant noise, it's just so overstimulating."**

Hours and Scheduling

Most respondents (69%) reported working 40 hours a week. This trend held across both Nebraska (67%) and New York (78%), and was consistent across temps (69%) and direct hires (70%). However, qualitative data painted a different picture, with Nebraska workers in particular describing long hours and mandatory overtime. One former worker said, **“There’s a lot of overtime. [Kawasaki has] no work-life balance either [...] I worked 10 hour days and 8 or 9 hour Saturdays for the majority of two years, pretty much straight.”** Another worker linked long work hours to physical exhaustion, **“I mean, it’s exhausting exerting that much physical energy, constantly all day, every day, like six days a week, nine and a half hours a day at times.”**

Later in their interview, when asked what kind of changes they would like to see at Kawasaki, they came back to this idea once again, saying:

No mandatory overtime. I mean, I just don’t think human beings are made to be in that kind of an environment for more than like 30 hours a week, you know? I mean, it’s a very demoralizing environment.

Beyond hours, workers were asked to indicate how far in advance of their first shift they usually received their schedules. While workers most commonly reported that their work hours stayed the same and did not change (37%), 31% of workers reported that their schedules were usually set only one day in advance. Disaggregated by location, New York workers experienced a shorter turnaround time, with 44% usually receiving their schedules within one day of their first shift compared to 28% in Nebraska.

Breaks

Workers were asked to report whether they had access to paid or unpaid breaks, including meal breaks. Across the entire sample, 62% of workers reported receiving paid breaks, 36% reported receiving unpaid breaks, and 2% reported receiving no breaks. Notably, only 72% of respondents reported having access to bathroom breaks and 66% to water breaks.

Break frequency varied by location. Nebraska workers (62%) were statistically more likely to receive 3-4 breaks, while the majority of New York workers (54%) received only 1-2 breaks.⁸⁰ However, analysis showed that New York workers were significantly more likely to report having access to both bathroom breaks and water breaks.⁸¹

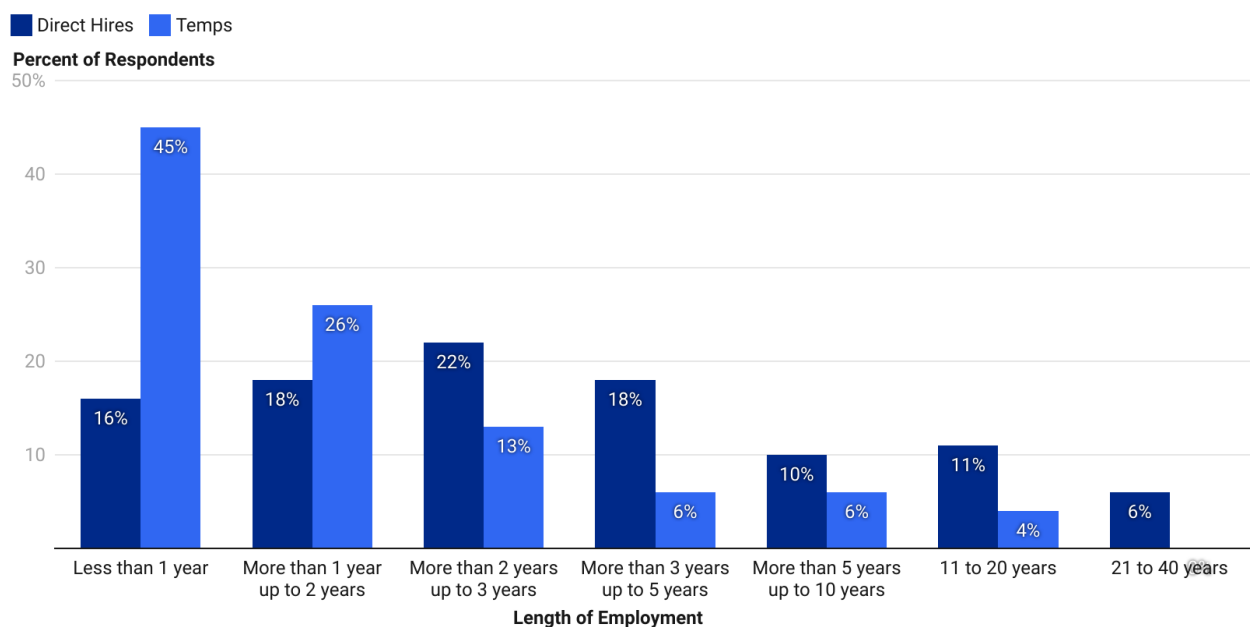
When cross-tested by worker status, data showed that 41% of temp workers reported receiving unpaid breaks compared to 32% of direct hire workers. In interviews, one Nebraska worker noted that certain breaks were tightly regulated, **“[T]hey were timing our bathroom breaks.”** This worker, who was disabled and walked with a cane, also observed that the facility did not seem to have enough bathrooms for all its workers and recalled being chastised for spending too much time in the bathroom, as well as for stepping away from their station to grab water on a 100-degree day.

Job Security

As highlighted in the sample profile, the majority of respondents (52%) reported being employed at Kawasaki for 2 years or less. However, these statistics diverge when disaggregated by location, with 61% of Nebraska respondents reporting a tenure of 2 years or less compared to 22% in New York.

Temps in aggregate had significantly shorter tenures, with 45% of surveyed temps reporting employment of one year or less compared to 16% of surveyed direct hires. Nearly three-quarters of all surveyed temp workers (71%) reported being employed two years or less, more than twice that of direct hires (34%). On average, surveyed temps worked at Kawasaki 3.9 years less than direct hires – a statistically significant difference.⁸²

Respondents' Length of Employment by Temp Status



In interviews, workers described high turnover rates, particularly in Nebraska. One former worker stated, **"I think the day that I quit, there was three people that all quit the same day, and one of them was a supervisor, one had been there for a long time. That was like 50 years of experience that left."** High turnover seemed particularly prevalent for temp workers, with one worker describing temps as more disposable. As another worker put it, Kawasaki was apparently, **"Churning them out."** This is consistent with the survey data showing surveyed temp workers had significantly shorter tenure at Kawasaki than direct hires. One former Nebraska worker said the following about the company's use of temps:

They have all the low wage people come in [...] Put them at the job for six months, they get themselves fired. Well put in another one, plug and play. And so that's probably their business model. It's keeping wages low.

Workers also described fearing retaliation for perceived infractions such as getting injured on the job and calling out for emergencies – another threat to job security.

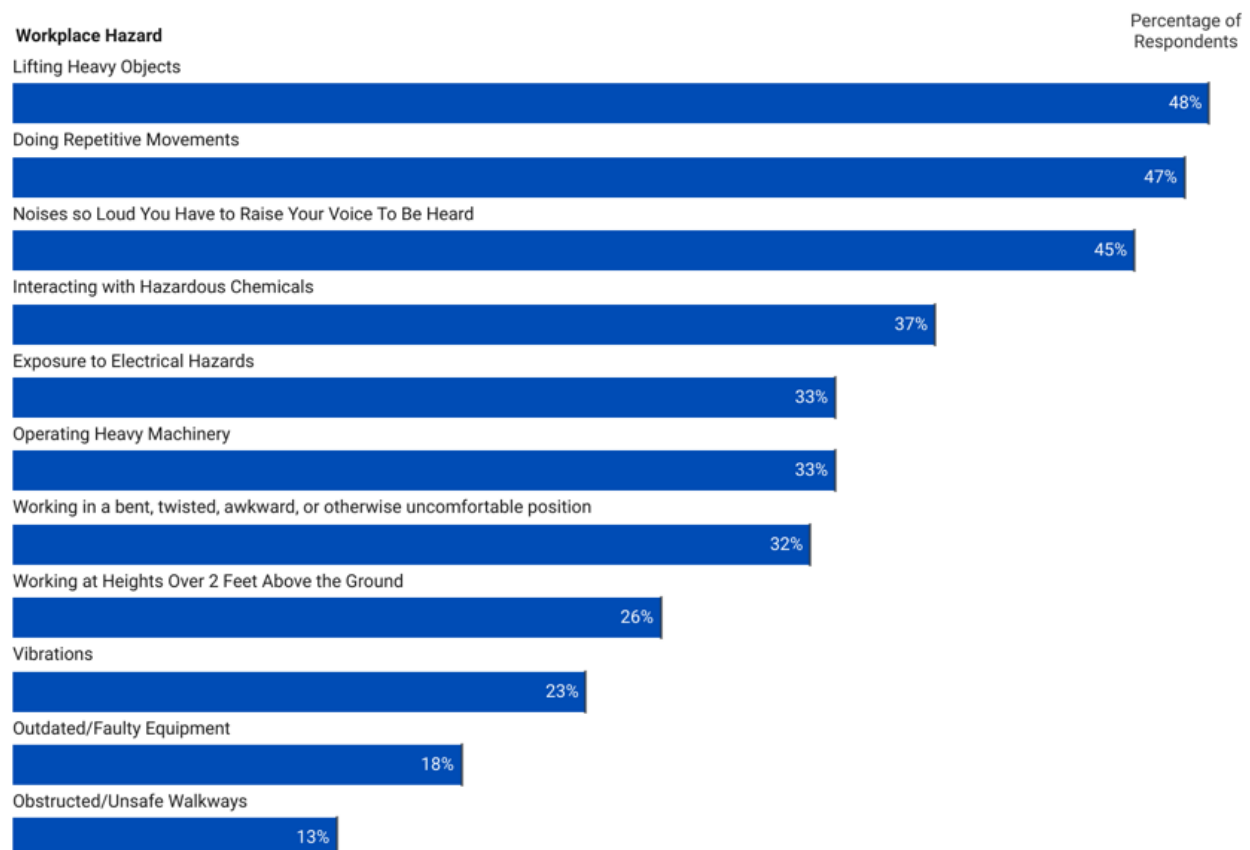
Workplace Hazards and Safety

Commonly reported workplace hazards were lifting heavy objects (48%), doing repetitive movements (47%), loud noises (45%), and interacting with hazardous chemicals (37%). Notably, 18% of respondents reported using outdated or faulty equipment.

Workers in New York were more likely to report being exposed to electrical hazards (48%) than workers in Nebraska (29%). Analysis showed statistically significant differences in the types of health and safety resources workers had access to by location, with New York workers reporting having more access to ventilation and first aid than workers in Nebraska.⁸³

Respondents' Exposure to Workplace Hazards

Proportion of all respondents exposed to each of the following workplace hazards



Some workers mentioned additional hazards in the qualitative data – specifically temperature. While one New York worker commented on cold temperatures, several Nebraska workers noted concerns about heat at that facility. One worker stated, “**During the summer I think they need to do more than supply water [...] it gets extremely hot in there. We shouldn’t worry about having heat strokes or heat exhaustion.**”

Feeling unsafe and witnessing unsafe practices both arose as key themes in the qualitative data. One Nebraska worker described unsafe practices encouraged by supervisors:

They’d tell me to wait until everybody left and I would get up on a scissor lift and kind of crawl out there to fix some things. Now, I did it, you know what I’m saying? But I was influenced by my bosses to do it. So, like, I’m 20 some feet in the air and without safety equipment, you know? Any kind of a harness or a safety strap or anything like that, because in order to get [the car] back into that station where you could get on the roof, you had to move two cars out, which cuts into time for the people working in those cars to get that car back in, to do the stuff safely.

Another worker said that safety was often sacrificed for production, stating that in their experience workers avoided alerting their supervisors to hazardous conditions in order to maintain quotas. Some workers also reported unsafe or dangerous equipment or practices, and a couple of workers mentioned operating machinery without up-to-date certification.



*A Kawasaki M9 EMU stops on the MTA Long Island Rail Road.
Credit: Bebo2good1 via Wikimedia Commons*

Injuries

Workers reported witnessing (40%) and experiencing (17%) a workplace injury. Of those injured, 43% reported having been injured at least twice.

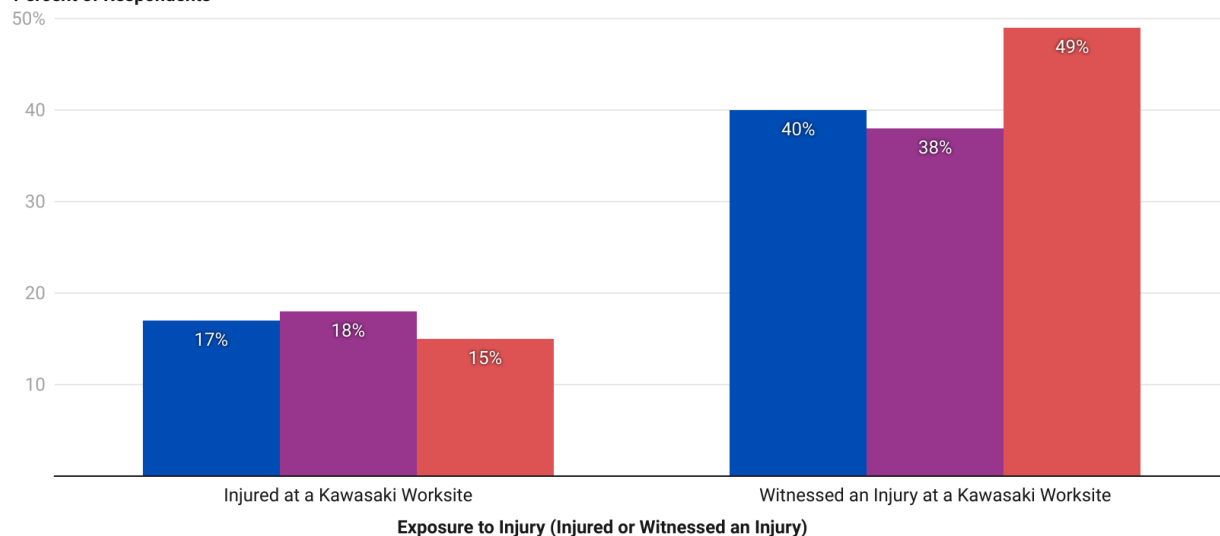
Reported injury rates were consistent between Nebraska (18%) and New York (15%), between direct hires (17%) and temps (18%), and between men (17%) and women (18%). Racial differences were more pronounced: AAPI workers (33%) and Non-White Hispanic workers (22%) reported the highest rates of injury, while Black workers reported the lowest (8%).

Respondents' Experience of Injury on Kawasaki Worksites

Proportion of respondents who have either experienced an injury themselves or witnessed a coworker get injured on Kawasaki worksites for the full sample and disaggregated by location.

■ All ■ Nebraska ■ New York

Percent of Respondents



While Nebraska and New York workers reported experiencing similar rates of injury at their worksite, New York workers (49%) reported witnessing a coworker get injured at higher rates than Nebraska workers (38%). New York workers (95%) also reported feeling more comfortable informing their boss about workplace injuries than Nebraska workers (82%), while temps in aggregate reported feeling slightly less comfortable than direct hires (81% versus 89%).

Workplace injuries were described in more detail during the interview process. One worker reported witnessing a coworker lose their finger, while another reported their own finger being detached. Of the latter incident, the worker recalled being more concerned about their job security than their personal health and wellbeing:

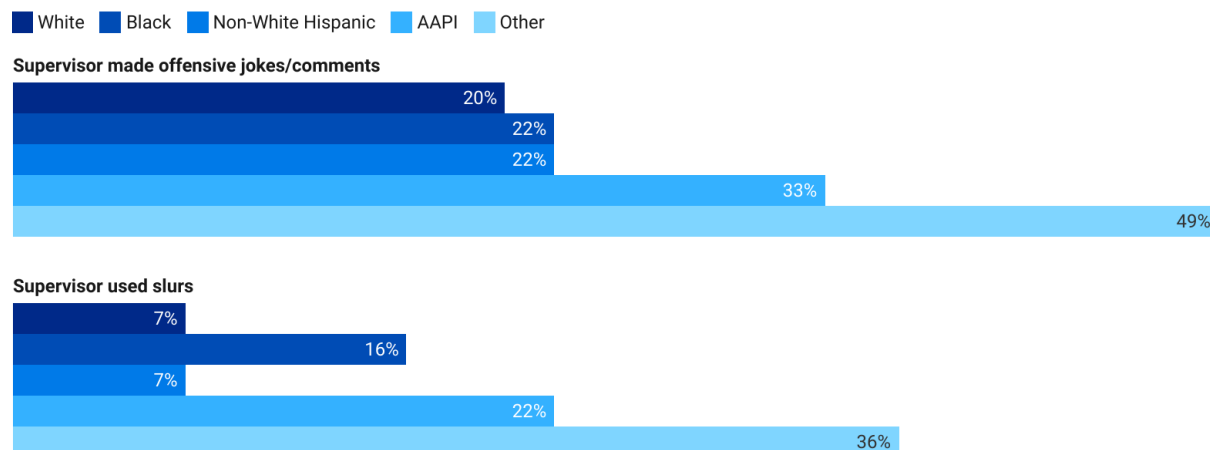
[T]hey took me to the medical room and I remember asking [...] 'Am I gonna get fired for this?' It wasn't like, 'Hey, can you help me?' or 'Am I gonna be okay?' or 'Can I go to the hospital?' It was, 'Am I gonna get fired for this?' - because that's how worried I was about my job.

Discrimination and Harassment

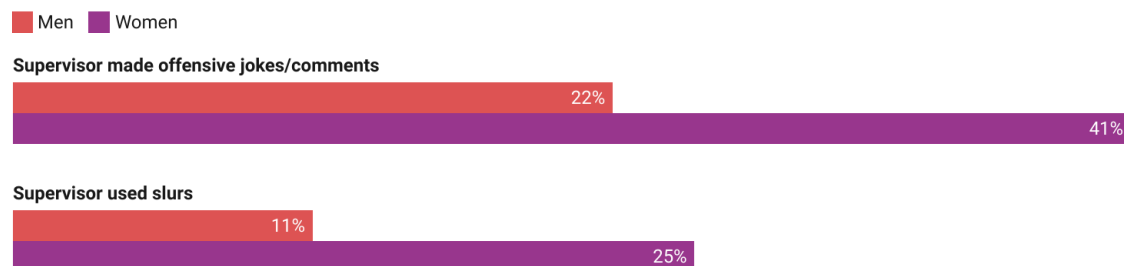
Respondents were given a list of discriminatory behaviors and asked to indicate if they had personally experienced any of them, and if so, their perceived reason for the treatment. Across both facilities, workers reported earning less money than someone doing the same job (33%), having to work harder than their colleagues to get the same recognition (27%), being treated as if they were not competent (21%), and being unfairly denied a promotion (19%). Workers who reported these experiences most commonly cited race (19%), gender (12%), and arrest/conviction record (6%) as reasons for their treatment. Additionally, half of all respondents reported witnessing unfair treatment, which they most commonly ascribed to gender (24%), race (24%), and immigration status (10%).

Workers reported witnessing a supervisor or boss making offensive comments or jokes (27%) and using slurs or derogatory language about a group of people (16%). Analysis found that surveyed BIPOC workers were more likely to witness their supervisor's offensive behavior compared to White workers.⁸⁴ Women were also more likely to witness their supervisors making offensive comments or jokes, and using slurs.⁸⁵

Experiencing Offensive Behavior in the Workplace by Respondents' Race/Ethnicity



Experiencing Offensive Behavior by Gender



Respondents were asked to report whether they had a way to inform their supervisor, manager, or boss at their worksite about unfair treatment, discrimination, or harassment, and whether they felt comfortable doing so. 30% of all respondents reported not feeling comfortable informing their supervisor about harassment. Men reported feeling comfortable informing a supervisor about harassment at higher rates than women (74% versus 61%).

In interviews, discrimination arose as a key theme. A couple of workers discussed their personal experiences of feeling discriminated against due to their disability or criminal record. One non-cisgender worker relayed that they did not feel safe enough in their workplace to come out to their colleagues. In Nebraska, several workers shared their beliefs that racial discrimination played a role in promotions and positions of authority, with one worker saying, **"Promotions are usually given to a person liked by upper management and people of a certain race. I feel [...] that no matter how hard I work or know more about the job than others, I'll never be given opportunities of advancement."**

Business Culture and Job Design

Survey and interview data overwhelmingly characterized Kawasaki as a negative work environment, describing its culture as rife with mismanagement, poor treatment, and an ethos that prioritizes production over people. As one worker put it:

Working at Kawasaki it felt like they cared more about stuff getting done and quotas than the well being of their staff. A lot of people there seemed worked to the bone [...] There wasn't really in [sic] room for if you had an emergency or anything it was like you show up or you could lose your job even if you weren't a person who called in at all. Life happens but again it seemed they were more set on making money than what their workers were experiencing.

In the words of another worker:

They didn't really care about people's health and safety. They care more or less about, like, 'Are you working?' Like if you were sick or kids were sick or anything like that and you had to take off, you would be pointed or disciplined by them, as opposed to things being excused.

One worker, who had a disability, recounted being prohibited from sitting on a stool at their work station during breaks. Another worker recalled being chastised for not getting more work done due to medical constraints from a workplace injury. Workers described feeling pushed to compromise their own safety for production speed, as echoed in an earlier section on "Workplace Hazards and Safety."

Some workers expressed that this disregard extended to product quality. One worker described experiencing product checks and fixes being skirted or rushed in order to meet quotas in a timely manner,



A worker handles glass in an industrial setting.
Credit: Hanna Alves via Pexels

passing on potential problems down the assembly line, “[It was a] ‘hurry up and get it out the door’ mentality. You know, push it off to the next group and they’ll figure out whatever is [...] if there’s something messed up, they’ll fix it before it’s sold.”

The same worker chastised the company for using this approach to deflect blame for production delays, “[S]ometimes the problems are sent to the field. If the problem is known or whatever, stop sending it to the field. Get it fixed beforehand. Because then it becomes the field’s workload. Then [Kawasaki] could play ‘Why isn’t it sold on time?’”

Reported instances of disregard for product quality were linked with another issue – lack of accountability attributed to poor management. A few workers remarked feeling like they had to fix others’ problems, including problems that emerged from a rush to get products to their next stop. Some felt that management discouraged workers from owning up to problems, while others described being tasked with responsibility or decisionmaking beyond their work scope and receiving little support from management. Several

workers mentioned feeling like Human Resources (HR) or management failed to act accordingly when workplace issues were reported to them. One worker stated, “[W]hen brought to HR the situation only gets worse” and another that, “[T]hey don’t have the time to listen to workers or team leaders.” Yet another worker recalled the sheer logistical barriers for a floor worker to report an issue to HR, saying,

The only time you can go up there [to the HR office] is at the end of your shift. So you can’t even go before your shift. Because they’re not even there. They don’t even start their day until 7, so yours starts at 6:30, how are you going to talk to them?

Lack of transparency also emerged as an issue at Kawasaki, particularly around pay. Notably, 18% of all survey respondents reported being instructed by a supervisor not to discuss their pay with others – 17% of Nebraska respondents and 22% of New York respondents. One New York worker explained in an interview, “Kawasaki in general is very closed-mouth about pay [...] Unless you do your homework or negotiate properly, they’ll underpay you if they can.”

Advancement

Limited advancement was a common issue, wherein multiple workers reported feeling like they had no growth pathways or opportunities. One worker commented, “[T]hey make it hard to move up,” and another that, “[I]t feels like a dead end job because they do not allow you to move around.” One temp worker described being shuffled between roles without ever advancing to a direct hire position, “[I] had 3 years of changing titles but never offered full time there.” Survey data reflect this, with 10% of surveyed temps reporting a tenure of more than 5 years.

Additionally, many workers noted a perceived culture of nepotism or favoritism. One respondent stated, “If you are not a ‘drinking buddy’ with management there’s no room to advance” and another that, “People are promoted, in my observation, if they are buddies with the higher ups.”

On-the-Job Skills Development

Respondents reported that trainings were largely limited to compliance-related topics: health and safety training (74%), sexual harassment training (52%), and anti-discrimination training (44%). Nearly half of workers (49%) reported receiving training to maintain their existing job, 46% received training to acquire new skills, and 33% received training to advance to a new job or role.

Nebraska respondents were significantly more likely to report receiving training to maintain their existing job and acquire new skills,⁸⁶ while New York respondents were more likely to report receiving anti-discrimination and sexual harassment training.⁸⁷

The survey did not assess worker satisfaction with their training, but the limited qualitative data from interviews indicated mixed perceptions. One worker said, “I feel like the training was adequate, as far as things that we needed to be equipped with,” and another, “I wish there was more training.”

ARE THESE GOOD JOBS?

The experiences reported by Kawasaki workers reflect the broader deterioration of manufacturing job quality over the last four decades. Comparing these findings to the Urban Institute’s Congdon et al. (2020) meta-framework for “good jobs,”⁸⁸ summarized in the adjacent table, it is evident that jobs at Kawasaki fail to meet core criteria.⁸⁹

On average, surveyed Kawasaki workers reported an hourly wage of \$22.79, which is \$4.38 (16%) below the mean hourly wage rate of \$27.17 for production occupations in railroad rolling stock manufacturing.⁹⁰ Surveyed temps, BIPOC workers at the Nebraska facility, and women were paid the lowest wages – more than \$6/hour below the industry average.

Wages in both locations were only marginally above local living wage thresholds for a single adult with no children: \$20.46 for Lancaster County, Nebraska⁹¹ and \$28.87 for the New York City Metro Area.⁹² The fact that workers are paid this close to the living wage line – or below it, for those who have significant others, children, or other dependents – contextualizes the high rates of financial insecurity reported in the survey, particularly among temps, women, and BIPOC workers, and underscores well-documented declines of the wage premium for manufacturing jobs,⁹³ as well as widening wage gaps for BIPOC and women manufacturing workers.⁹⁴

In terms of benefits,⁹⁵ direct hire workers reported having access to health insurance, paid time off, and retirement plans. However, some respondents in Nebraska were less satisfied with the quality of these benefits. Temp workers, on the other hand, reported receiving very limited benefits through their staffing agencies. If benefits were available, they were often described as unaffordable. These findings, if representative of Kawasaki’s workforce as a whole, are consistent with the broader national trend of shrinking benefits for manufacturing workers.⁹⁶

Kawasaki’s working conditions also fell short. The majority of survey respondents reported working a standard 40-hour workweek, suggesting predictable hours. However, the qualitative data emphasized

Table 3. Meta-Framework Developed by Congdon et al.

What Makes a Good Job?	
Pay	Level of pay Predictability of pay
Benefits	Health insurance Retirement plans Leave Other benefits (disability insurance, etc.) Educational benefits
Working Conditions	Stable, predictable hours Control over hours/location Job security Safety Nondiscrimination
Business Culture and Job Design	Culture of belonging Culture of diversity, equity and inclusion Strong organizational mission Meaningfulness of tasks Focus on personal growth Autonomy Diversity of tasks Clearly defined career paths
On-the-Job Skills Development	Training for specific tasks and promotion opportunities

long work hours and physical exhaustion, and the fact that nearly one-third of workers reported usually receiving their schedules only one day in advance suggests that scheduling may be unstable.

High turnover coupled with the sheer proportion of surveyed workers employed two years or less, particularly in Nebraska, seems to substantiate the lack of security provided by these jobs. More than half of surveyed respondents were temp workers – a strong indicator of insecurity, as the growth of temporary work arrangements is associated with reduced job stability.⁹⁷ Nearly three-quarters of surveyed temps reported being employed two years or less and several workers identified high turnover amongst temps specifically. Moreover, the fact that fear of retaliation arose as a key theme under working conditions – specifically, fear of retaliation for minor “infractions” such as taking too long in the bathroom, leaving one’s work station to grab water, and calling off work for an emergency – also suggests a lack of job security.

While most workers had access to safety equipment, more than one-in-ten workers reported experiencing an injury and four-in-ten reported witnessing an injury at their worksite. Qualitative data identified specific practices workers considered unsafe, like operating machinery without up-to-date certification and scaling the roof of a subway car without a harness, the latter of which was allegedly at the request of management. A couple of interviewees also alleged permanent injury and worsened disability from their experience working at Kawasaki. All of these findings suggest a potentially unsafe work environment.

Perceptions of discrimination at Kawasaki were a recurring issue – one third of workers reported experiencing unfair treatment, and half of workers reported witnessing unfair treatment based on a number of protected categories. In their survey responses, some workers reported witnessing supervisors making offensive comments and jokes, as well as using slurs or derogatory language about a group of people. In open-ended survey answers and interviews, multiple workers described experiencing or witnessing supervisors administering unfair treatment based on race, gender, and disability. A couple of workers mentioned instances of sexual harassment by supervisors, and a few workers held the perception that race or history in the criminal justice system limited their advancement at work.

Business culture at Kawasaki was widely described as prioritizing production quotas over worker well-being, and qualitative data indicated widespread dissatisfaction with management among the surveyed and interviewed workers. Workers consistently reported low morale, minimal accountability, and restrictions on discussing wages. The feeling that there were no growth opportunities, a perceived culture of nepotism and favoritism, and the fact that only one-third of workers reported receiving training to advance into a new job or role suggest that workers are not given advancement opportunities nor a defined career path.

Finally, when examining surveyed workers’ one-the-job skills development, results were mixed on whether or not it met the definition of a good job. About half of workers reported receiving training to maintain their existing job, but fewer than half reported receiving training to acquire new skills or advance to a new role. In limited qualitative data, workers were split between feeling satisfied with their training and wishing for more training.

Impact of Temporary Labor

In addition to assessing overall job quality at Kawasaki, this research aimed to evaluate the role and impact of Kawasaki's reliance on temporary workers, particularly on job quality and production. While more recent data on the proportion of temporary workers in the manufacturing workforce is lacking, the U.S. Department of Commerce estimated between 8% and 10% of manufacturing workers were temps in 2015.⁹⁸ Comparing those estimates to survey data presented in this report, wherein just over half of respondents were temps, seems to suggest a higher than average use of temp workers by Kawasaki.

Surveyed temps at Kawasaki experienced lower job quality than their direct hire colleagues. Temps were statistically more likely to be paid less than direct hires overall and reported distinctly worse benefits than direct hires, including limited or no paid time off and expensive/unaffordable healthcare. This is consistent with the claim that temps in manufacturing are paid less and receive fewer benefits than direct hire workers.⁹⁹ It is important to note that these discrepancies in pay and benefits persist despite over 90% of surveyed temps and direct hires alike working full-time schedules. Moreover, temps are subject to the same poor working conditions and workplace culture. In fact, for some aspects of job quality such as breaks or job security, surveyed temps fared worse than their direct hire colleagues.

Generally speaking, manufacturers use temporary workers to accommodate fluctuations in demand for their products, screen workers for permanent jobs, and save money on labor costs.¹⁰⁰ In this way, temporary workers fit the needs of Kawasaki's "just-in-time" production process, which is responsive to changing demand and aims to minimize waste.¹⁰¹ However, the reported pay and benefits gaps between surveyed temps and direct hires at Kawasaki facilities – coupled with the fact that just 34% of direct hires surveyed were formerly temps and over a quarter of temps were employed for more than two years without achieving direct hire status – provide evidence that Kawasaki does not use temp labor primarily as a pipeline to permanent employment, but rather as a measure to cut down on labor costs.

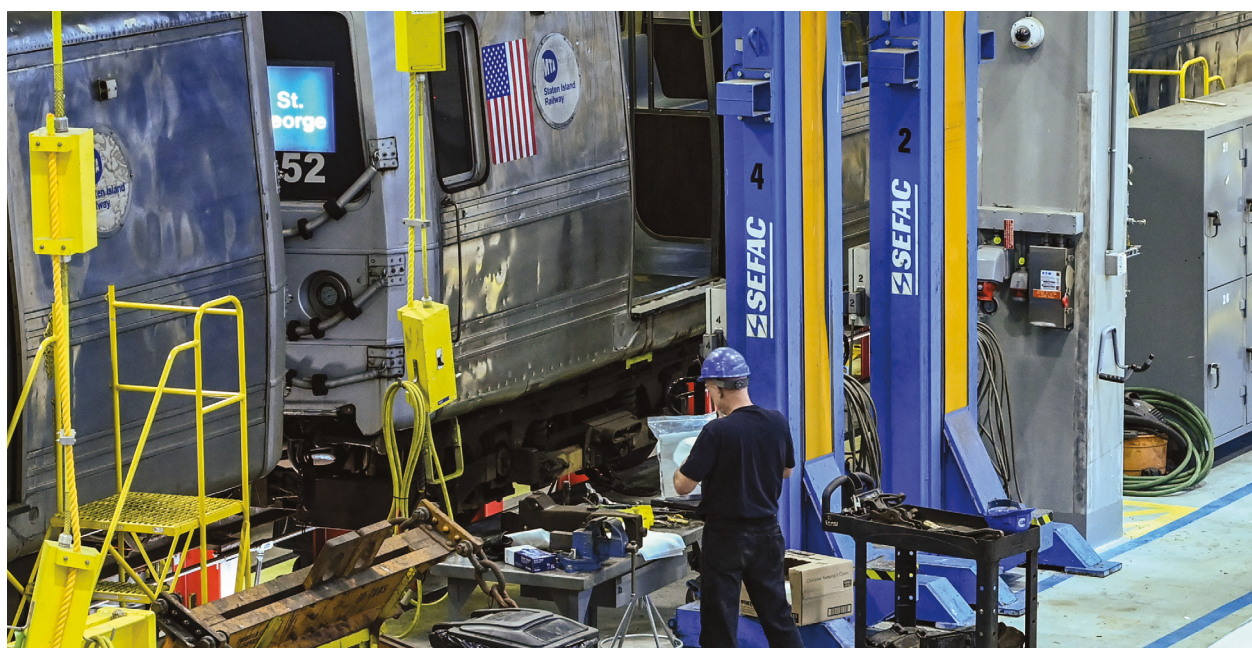
Over the past two decades, Kawasaki has suffered a series of production setbacks – including delays to four major contracts, costly and persistent defects impacting the M-9 and 7000-series cars, and high turnover at the Nebraska facility forcing intervention by the MTA. Research indicates a negative correlation between use of temp workers and manufacturing quality performance.¹⁰² In other words, the more temps a manufacturer employs, the lower quality its products may be. Moreover, high turnover among temporary workers is shown to undermine learning and skill development, and deploying temps in "upstream" manufacturing positions can lead to lower product quality, longer production times, and increased system-wide costs.¹⁰³ Thus, the high density, short tenure, and high turnover rate among surveyed temps at Kawasaki's facilities, if it were representative of Kawasaki's workforce as a whole, could contribute to production problems and delays in delivering on the company's government contracts.

CONCLUSION

In its \$4.5 billion contract with the MTA, Kawasaki Heavy Industries committed to providing high quality jobs and workforce training programs. Yet, the findings of this report indicate that the jobs being created or retained through this contract may not, in fact, be good jobs.

Survey responses and follow-up interviews with Kawasaki workers revealed persistent and widespread issues including low pay, hazardous working conditions, and unfair treatment attributed to discrimination. These disparities were particularly acute for temporary, BIPOC, and women workers. Temps, who represented over half of all survey respondents, earned almost \$5 less per hour on average than direct hires, while exhibiting shorter tenures and higher turnover rates. Broader research on the growth and impact of temporary labor in the manufacturing sector links temp use with longer production times and lower product quality. Considering recent examples of production delays and product defects on Kawasaki contracts, this two-tiered employment structure raises concerns about the company's ability to meet its contractual performance benchmarks.

When measured against an accepted framework for “good jobs,” the Kawasaki jobs assessed in our survey failed to meet key standards related to compensation, working conditions, and business culture. Given that Kawasaki’s railcar manufacturing is subsidized by public dollars, the MTA holds both the authority and the obligation to enforce higher labor standards in its contracts. Policies like the U.S. Employment Plan are powerful tools to ensure that public procurement drives equity, safety, and dignity at work. When effectively enforced, these policies can help create not just more manufacturing jobs, but better ones.



*Opening ceremony at the MTA's new Staten Island Railway Clifton Maintenance Shop on December 7, 2022.
Credit: Metropolitan Transportation Authority via Wikimedia Commons*

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- 71 Statistically significant via t-test ($P=.0112$)
- 72 Statistically significant via Fisher's exact test ($P=.008$ and $P=.020$, respectively)
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- 75 Statistically significant via Kruskal-Wallis test ($P=.0335$ and $P=.0050$, respectively)
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- 77 Statistically significant via Wilcoxon-Mann Whitney test ($P=.0254$)
- 78 Statistically significant via Wilcoxon-Mann Whitney test ($P=.0179$)
- 79 Statistically significant via Wilcoxon-Mann Whitney test ($P=.0462$, $P=.0103$, $P=.0064$, and $P=.0022$, respectively)
- 80 Statistically significant via two-tailed t-tests ($P=.0025$)
- 81 Statistically significant via Pearson chi-square test ($P=.009$ and $P=.002$, respectively)
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