

## Governor Appoints TNEC Project Director to serve on MA Employee Safety and Health Advisory Committee



Governor Deval Patrick and Morse at UMass Lowell earlier this year.

On September 2, Governor Deval Patrick appointed Paul Morse, Co-Principal Investigator and Project Director of The New England Consortium to serve on the Massachusetts Employee Safety and Health Advisory Committee.

The appointment comes pursuant to an Executive Order issued by the Governor in April 2009. The executive order calls for the establishment of safety committees in all state agencies to document workplace hazards and safety measures needed.

The Massachusetts Employee Safety and Health Advisory Committee mission is to evaluate injury and illness data, recommend training and implementation of safety and health measures, monitor the effectiveness of safety and health programs, and determine where additional resources are needed to protect the safety and health of the Commonwealth's employees.

The advisory committee is made up of 13 members, including the Director of Labor, the Chief Human Resources Officer, the Commissioner of the Division of Occupational Safety, the Secretary of Administration and Finance, the Director of the Office of Employee Relations, the Commissioner of the Department of Public Health, and the Commissioner of the Department of Industrial Accidents or their designees.

Additionally, there are four representatives from labor unions representing the employees of the Commonwealth, one representative from a community-based health and safety advocacy organization, and Professor Emeritus David Wegman, former Dean of the UMass Lowell School of Health and Environment. Mr. Morse is serving on the Advisory Committee as a representative of the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA). He serves as the Co-Chair of MTA's statewide Environmental Health and Safety Committee.

The Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), passed in 1970, develops and enforces job safety and health standards and regulations. These standards limit the amount of hazardous chemicals workers can be exposed to, mandate the use of certain safety practices, equipment and training, and require employers to monitor hazards and maintain records of workplace injuries and illnesses. The law made it an option but did not require states to provide OSHA protections to their public employees. But if a state adopted OSHA guidelines, the federal government would pick up 50% of the cost. More than 20 states provide public sector workers with equal protections. The same should be true in Massachusetts. Currently, over 400,000 State, County and City workers in the state lack the same OSHA Protections that cover employees in the private sector.

Legislative efforts to rectify this are stalled and the Governor's Order is an important step forward.