



The New England Consortium's Quarterly

A Newsletter about Working with Toxic Materials, Health and Safety Training, Law and Public Policy

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Federal Agency Town Meeting to Set Ten Year Worker Safety Research Agenda

On March 20, more than 60 people testified at a regional public hearing sponsored by the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) held at University of Massachusetts Lowell. Immigrant workers, teens, union leaders, and health and safety advocates urged the federal government to prioritize worker health and safety research towards the needs of immigrants, teens, and health care workers.

"Immigrant workers and youth in our state and country have a disproportionately high rate of injury," said Fausto da Rocha, executive director of the Brazilian Immigrant Center. "NIOSH can and must devote the research resources needed to understand how to best prevent injury, illness, and fatalities within these populations."

Among the most powerful presentations were seven teen health and safety advocates who shared facts and their own work experiences in the afternoon panel, after school. Raquel Lamons from the Massachusetts Coalition of Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSHS) stated that "Each year, 70 teens are killed on the job. That is about one every 5 days. Over 200,000 working teens are injured and 70,000 teens are injured seriously enough to require hospital emer-

gency room treatment. Teens are often asked to do dangerous work but lack power and information about their rights in the workplace." Youth advocates also put forward recommendations to stem the escalating rate of injuries and fatalities among teen workers.

Brazilian, Latino, and Haitian Immigrant leaders testified about the every day life of immigrant workers. The call for more outreach to immigrant workers was heard throughout the day. Cora Roelofs from the University of Massachusetts Lowell noted that, "Immigrants and workers of color often work in the most dangerous jobs. They are frequently unaware of their rights and fear retribution from their employers if they speak up. They have also been underserved by research money in the past. We must work closely with



Left to right: Petra Miesmaa, Event Organizer, Craig Slatin, Associate Professor Dept. of Community Health and Sustainability, Max Lum, Associate Director for Health Communications, NIOSH, Marcy Goldstein Gelb, Director MassCOSHS, and Dr. David Wegman, Dean School of Health and Environment UMass Lowell.

JFY Networks Partners with UMass Lowell on Job Training

TNEC just completed its 40-hour Hazardous Waste Site Worker Health and Safety training for students from JFYNetworks Environmental Technology program. Over the last eleven consecutive years, TNEC has partnered with JFYNetworks to provide this training to nearly 300 of its training program participants. Additionally, for the last three years TNEC has delivered 8-hour All Hazards Emergency Awareness training to this same group of students.

JFYNetworks, Boston's largest workforce and career development training center for youth and adults offers GED preparation, computerized MCAS preparation, computer skills, and industry-based job skills training. Since its founding 27 years ago, JFY has trained over 20,000 youth and adults from all city neighborhoods.

In 1993, JFY began its Environmental Technology training for high-skill career ladder programs. In 1998, the US Environmental Protection Agency selected the JFY Environmental Technology Training as one of the first 10 national Brownfields Job Training Pilots. The EPA continues to be a principal supporter of the program.

JFY is currently partnering with the Center to Protect Workers Rights, Suffolk University, and UMass Lowell under a cooperative agreement with the National Institute of Environmental Sciences on training that prepares candidates for jobs as field and lab

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Immigrant and Teen Advocates Call for Efforts to Stem Injuries and Fatalities at Work

entire communities, including families, local governments and religious communities, to reach these alienated workers and learn more about their daily hazards at work.”

NIOSH was praised for supporting three highly successful community-based research initiatives in Dorchester and Somerville, Massachusetts addressing the Brazilian community.

Research Priorities for Health Care Providers

Health care industry worker health and safety issues were the focus of many presenters. Members and staff of the Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA), university researchers, and health care professionals discussed safe patient handling, violence in workplace, exposure to hazardous drugs, and needle stick injuries. Elizabeth O'Connor a nurse and MNA member reported, “A few years ago, OSHA estimated close to one million needle stick injuries in the health care sector in this country each year. The number is an estimate since it is recognized that probably 50 % of these injuries go unreported. The health care industry is the fastest growing segment in the US economy. For this reason more and more workers will have the potential for exposure in the future.”

“Nurses are seldom trained to protect themselves when working with the wide range of hazardous antineoplastic and other drugs that they provide to patients,” said Evie Bain, the Health and Safety Director for the MNA. These drugs have known exposure effects, such as cancers and reproductive sys-

tem disorders. In addition to the lack of training nurses receive, little is even known about how to protect nurses from these dangerous drug exposures. She urged NIOSH to conduct research that would provide the evidence needed to put appropriate health and safety programs into practice.

All health care advocates highlighted the relationship between health care worker health and safety and providing appropriate care for patients.

Educators, Professionals, University Programs

In her written testimony, Cathy Boudreau, President of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, which represents 97,000 members throughout Massachusetts, noted that public sector workers in Massachusetts are not protected by federal health and safety regulations. As a result, there is “...no systematic collection of data on the occupational injuries and illnesses of teachers. Our members have been exposed to hazardous work environment and building materials, including asbestos, but there is scant data available to inform policy and prevention.” She discussed the problems of poor indoor air quality in public buildings, the growing concerns about mold exposures, and that a recent MA Department of Public Health pilot study of teachers and school

staff employees suggested that a third of those studied suffer from respiratory diseases.

Presenters from New England, New York, Illinois, and Washington, D.C. also discussed the need for health and safety training for workers, better surveillance of occupational illnesses and injuries in

“I have been conducting training with SEIU since 1985. Too often I have observed other training presentations that had little impact for workers. Too often training is delivered by lecture, PowerPoint, video, and on-line with little quality assurance. It's boring versus a more dynamic and participatory model where learners collaborate together in small groups and hands-on exercises that are peer-led. Adequate time is allotted and devoted to the process and workers are encouraged to evaluate what they learn and apply it to their work. Fundamentally there are three important questions to evaluating training: 1) what is the quality of the training 2) is the length adequate and 3) is there enough frequency and follow-up that supports workers in their jobs?”

—Steve Schrag, Health and Safety Project Coordinator, SEIU



Audience members listen to speakers at NIOSH regional public hearing.

order to provide evidence for prevention programs, ergonomics programs that will prevent the heavy toll of workplace related muscular skeletal disorders such as carpal tunnel and back injuries, and work organization issues.

Striving for Excellence in Training Programs and Criteria for Quality

TNEC Project Director, Paul Morse urged NIOSH to conduct additional research into the effectiveness of worker education health and safety training programs and in so doing closely evaluate outcomes derived from different approaches to training. He emphasized that TNEC like other members of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences Worker Education Training Program has been successful because the program seeks to maintain training at a level of quality laid out in the Minimum Criteria Guidance in Appendix E of the OSHA HAZWOPER standard 29 CFR 1910.120 which the program has recently updated to apply better to All-Hazards Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Response.

“Each year in our annual progress report to NIEHS, we are able to cite numerous anecdotal examples of ways that workers are bringing training lessons learned back to their workplaces. We know that the participatory design of our program and the investment we make each year in updating and developing new curriculum supports these outcomes. It's a training model that empowers workers to take action and to reflect upon the outcomes of those actions.”

News from the COSHs

Western Mass

Western Mass Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health will be holding their 30th Anniversary Awards Dinner! The event will take place on Wednesday, May 17, 2006, from 6-9pm at Tony & Penny's Restaurant in Ludlow, MA. Western Mass COSH's Annual Dinner is a very important source of funding for Western MassCOSH. These funds enable the program to work on education, training, and political activism for workplace safety and health.

The Keynote Speaker is Deval Patrick, a Massachusetts Democratic Gubernatorial Candidate. For tickets or further information please contact 413.731.0760.

Rhode Island Lead Poisoning: One Step at a time

When the idea of a state class action suit first broke surface in Rhode Island in the mid 1990s it was explicitly directed at the limitation of dealing with lead poisoning in a reactive rather than preventive mode. The inability to move into prevention has been based on several dynamics. One is the lack of a public health infrastructure that could actively work on healthy, safe, and affordable housing. The second basis was funding. At the time the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development had pegged the initial costs of lead abatement nationwide at \$500 billion. In RI, some officials have pegged the cost of clean up as high as \$3 billion.

Influenced by the tobacco settlement, the idea of a class action against the lead paint industry was developed at a regional Attorney's General conference held in Rhode Island in the mid 1990s. Involved in the

beginning stages of this process were Rick Rabin from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bob Vanderslice for the Rhode Island Department of Health, Terry Tierney from the Rhode Island Office of Attorney General, and the Rhode Island Committee on Occupational Safety and Health. It was hoped that several states would join the RI action creating a wide and sustained pressure on the paint industry forcing them to negotiate a settlement. This did not happen. Some states tinkered with the idea, and several local cases were filed, heard, and lost.

A Rhode Island Superior Court jury this week has decided that three former makers of lead paint (Sherwin-Williams Co., NL Industries Inc. and Millennium Holdings LLC) created a public nuisance that continues to poison children, a ruling that means they could be held responsible for cleanup and mitigation costs. *This compliments an earlier development (7/1/05) that the DuPont Corporation will pay nearly \$12 million to settle the RI action without trial.*

Suits are pending in Wisconsin, New Jersey, California, New York, Texas and Missouri though in every other case the plaintiffs are cities and counties rather than states.

Driving the RI suit was the idea that the responsible industry fund a housing trust fund to provide for preventive abatement, upkeep and maintenance in an overall healthy housing strategy. Such a trust can target the most hazardous conditions prior to their impact on children. It can serve as a key pillar in developing and sustaining affordable and safe housing in high-risk areas.

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JFY Networks Partners with UMass Lowell on Job Training

technicians, hazardous materials handlers, emergency response technicians, decontamination technicians, environmental educators, and other jobs in the environmental and biomedical services industry. The overall 14-week program combines classroom and laboratory training, hands-on learning and field trips. Trainees learn

strategies for obtaining employment, successful workplace conduct, preparation for certification exams, and career development. Participating employer partners interview trainees on site. JFY graduates have been hired in private industry, government.

Massachusetts Teens Awarded for Workplace Safety Efforts

Two groups of youth leaders—one from Lynn, the other from Dorchester, Massachusetts—were honored on February 10, 2006, for their efforts to protect young workers.

Youth from Girls Inc. Career Path Program and peer leaders from the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSH) were jointly awarded the Community Activism Award. Working together, the youth from these two communities have learned about the issues and conditions young workers face and joined together to take action to prevent needless injury and death.

Fortunately, there are people working on preventing these incidents. The Massachusetts Coalition on Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSH) has recruited a team of youth organizers to conduct workshops and other forums for peers to make them aware of hazards on the job and their rights to a safe and healthy working environment. They produced a report on Workplace Violence Affecting Teens, and faced with the fact that teens in Massachusetts are injured on the job at approximately twice the rate of adults, they are also attacking the problem through the political process, supporting the passage of the Child Labor Reform Bill (House Bill 3790/Senate Bill 1094), meeting with community members and elected officials to draw attention to the bill's importance.

Frustrated by the serious lack of safety protections for young people, the MassCOSH peer leaders worked with Senator John Hart and Senator Patricia Jehlen to file a bill strengthening the enforcement authority of the Attorney General. The bill would enable the AG to fine employers who violate the Child Labor Laws through a civil process. The bill also requires that teens working after 8:00 PM be provided with adult supervision on site.

For their efforts, the MassCOSH peer leaders, along with the Youth from Girls Inc. Career Path Program were honored for their efforts to protect young workers at the North Shore Labor Council's Annual Dinner last week.

"I don't want to hear about another teen life being taken away when the situation could have been prevented," said Raquel Lamons, a 14-year-old Teens Lead at Work peer leader. "We want young people to be safe when they work."

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News from the COSHs

It is hoped that this approach can address not only lead, but other key housing-related health hazards such as asthma.

(James Celenza, RICOSH Director provided the background information on this important decision.)

MassCOSH New Workers Center Builds Immigrants' Power, Defends Rights

Thomas Martinez knows first-hand what it meant to be abused by an employer. Martinez worked for a landscaping company for over seven years. Unable to overcome his fear, he suffered from all sorts of abuses, ranging from being underpaid, not being paid for overtime, and working in very hazardous conditions to being mistreated by his boss. After working with MassCOSH for a couple of months and finally getting the back pay he deserved, he was determined not to let others suffer as he did.

Martinez joined forces with MassCOSH to launch a new Immigrant Workers' Center, along with a core group of immigrant workers, union and community representatives, attorneys, and safety experts. Being launched in April, MassCOSH's Workers' Center will bring together immigrant workers from different companies and industries to join in organizing for safer working conditions.

Through the Workers' Center, MassCOSH will guide the workers through a process where they will receive an introduction to workers' rights, their health and safety, and other work-related issues they may have in common. Workers will also have access to legal resources through MassCOSH's legal committee as well as through a new partnership with the Northeastern University School of Law. *(To get involved, contact Jean Carmel St. Juste at 617.825.7233 x12.) (This article was taken from the MassCOSH newsletter SafetyNet.)*

NHCOSH

At NH COSH, plans are under way for a day-long all-hazards training for municipal health officers. The organization also is helping carry out an indoor air quality program in eight schools in Manchester. NH COSH has taught several hundred immigrant workers this year about hazard communication, safety equipment, workers' compensation, and other workplace issues. NH COSH is also embarking on a new program to provide assistance to low income and immigrant workers with medical claims under workers' compensation.

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