TNEC Staff Attends Awardee Meeting and National Trainers Exchange in Las Vegas

The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) recently held their Awardee Meeting and National Trainers Exchange in Las Vegas on March 29–30, 2007. Over 200 program staff and trainers attended. The NIEHS Worker Education and Training Program (WETP), includes The New England Consortium (TNEC) and 17 other nationwide organizations.

WETP supports the training and education of workers engaged in activities related to hazardous materials and waste generation, removal, containment, transportation and emergency response. The WETP conducts training through a network of cooperative agreements with non-profit organizations.

The conference began by acknowledging the efforts and lessons learned through the WETP program over the last twenty years and envisioning where WETP wants to be in twenty more years. The first plenary session of the conference covered an historical overview of NIEHS Worker Education and Training Program with Linda Delp, UCLA-LOHI as the moderator. Panelists included Eula Bingham, University of Cincinnati, Robert Ballard, Clark-Atlanta University and Craig Slatin, University of Massachusetts Lowell.

Dr. Craig Slatin, Principal Investigator with TNEC shared his research on the history and the formation of WETP. Dr. Slatin and Mary Lee Dunn authored an article summarizing this research From SARA to Homeland Security: The NIEHS Worker Education and Training Program Confronts Challenges of Environmental Cleanup. (see http://www.uml.edu/tneq/Quarterly.html, December, 2006) The morning session of the conference focused on the WETP historical timeline and Dr. Slatin’s talk reviewed his research that details the history and success of worker educational programs in particular the WETP. “The NIEHS WETP built upon the lessons learned from earlier worker health education and training programs to establish a national worker health education intervention that has demonstrated the capacity of and potential for public health excellence,” stated Dr. Slatin. Dr. Slatin reviewed the integration of worker education programs into hazwaste/hazmat programs.

Pandemic Flu Train the Trainer Course for Worcester Region School System

The staff at The New England Consortium are members of the Massachusetts Teachers Union (MTA) and are working with MTA leaders, the MA Region II Public Health Emergency/Preparedness Coalition, Region I EPA-EPD Committee and the Education Association of Worcester to develop curriculum and a 'train the trainer' pandemic flu program. Curriculum development includes researching current and relevant healthcare materials on influenza, pandemic influenza, avian flu and disease prevention/protective health promotion. The materials will be used to develop a 90 minute in-service seminar for teachers and support staff in Region II. The curriculum development process will consist of group meetings and individual research by members of the coalition. The training will reach out to 71 schools and health district members from 74 districts.

Panelists at Awardee Meeting in Las Vegas include: (l to r) Robert Ballard, Clark-Atlanta University, Eula Bingham, University of Cincinnati, Moderator Linda Delp, UCLA-LOHI, and Dr. Craig Slatin, University of Massachusetts Lowell.
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Dr. Tom Estabrook, TNEC Lead Educator and Claudie Grout, Trainer for the New Hampshire Coalition for Occupation Safety and Health (NH COSH) a partner member of TNEC facilitated a workshop titled, Training to empower workers: Doing popular education “on the fly” in health and safety training. Tom and Claudie facilitated a workshop that was well attended and also worked with Mike Prokosch, UML Labor Extension Program, who prepared the workshop on popular education training methods which Dr. Estabrook and Claudie Grout co-facilitated. Their workshop consisted of many exercises and ideas on how to improve worker education through popular education techniques. The importance of worker education is discussed in length in Dr. Slatin and Mary Lee Dunn’s research paper. Claudie and Tom demonstrated in their workshop the techniques and refreshing ideas from the research paper on how to develop new leadership to build a bottom up movement for fundamental social change, justice and equality through popular education or ‘pop ed’. The leaders of the workshop shared their personal training experiences along with discussion on how through pop ed we learn by doing, telling our stories, sharing and describing our lives, seeing yourself as a trainer in relation to all people, including those of different ethnic groups and nationalities, social class, ages, genders and abilities. The workshop leaders also taught innovative approaches to worker education in worker education in health and safety.

Additionally, Dr. Holly Yanco and Mark Micire delivered an Advanced Technology Training (ATT) workshop to demonstrate development of advanced robotics technology, an interactive touch screen interface and command and control software.

TNEC Advisory Board Meeting Features Demonstration

Robotic technology, now used most often on the battlefield, could offer improved human safety during hazardous waste site remediation, hazardous material emergency response and disaster response.

The New England Consortium (TNEC), that provides an extensive Worker Health and Safety Training Program, has collaborated with the Computer Science Department's Robotics Lab. At a recent TNEC advisory board meeting, Assistant Professor Holly Yanco and doctoral candidate Mark Micire presented advances in robotics that could be useful in response situations.

Micire, former president and CEO of American Standard Robotics, is certified in multiple aspects of search and rescue, including hazardous material response and confined space rescue. He was a technical search operator during the World Trade Center disaster and a technical search leader during Hurricane Katrina response in Biloxi.

Micire led a discussion of modifications that would make existing robotic platforms more useful for HazMat responders and firefighters, including estimated costs. The one-year investigative project led by Yanco, with Associate Professor Sarah Kuhn of the Regional Economic and Social Development, and Dr. Jill Drury, adjunct professor in the Computer Science Department.

Micire also demonstrated an interactive touch screen, developed with grants from the National Science Foundation, that can be used for improved command and control in disaster response. The system allows individual, authorized users to overlay information on the screen, which also provides before and after satellite map images of the area affected by disaster.
News from the COSH's

MassCOSH and its supporters honor those killed and injured on the job, calling for safe jobs and strong protections.

Over 200 workers, union leaders, legislators, and family and community members joined MassCOSH on the State House steps to mourn the loss of 76 Massachusetts workers killed on the job in 2006 and to renew the fight for safe jobs and strong protections. Also present was MA Director of Labor George Noel affirming the Patrick Administration's commitment to safer jobs along with a number of legislators turning out to show their support.

The event, held on April 26 of this year was one of hundreds around the world to commemorate Workers Memorial Day 2007. The event coincided with the release of a report documenting the toll of unsafe conditions and insufficient workplace regulations. The report, Dying for Work, co-sponsored by MassCOSH and the AFL-CIO, makes clear that many of these deaths could have been prevented had the employers instituted basic and often inexpensive safety measures. “We saw a clear pattern of employers understaffing and overextending workers, and then blaming workers for accidents. We saw a pattern of employers failing to provide basic safety measures which in no uncertain terms prevent death,” said Marcy Goldstein-Gelb, Executive Director of MassCOSH. “We saw a pattern of employers cutting corners on safety at the price of human lives. But we will not rest until employers put safety before profits.”

RI COSH

Protecting America's Workers Act (S. 1244/H.R. 2049)

Nearly 16 workers in the United States die each day from injuries sustained at work, and 134 die from work-related disease. Daily, an estimated 11,500 private-sector workers have a nonfatal work-related injury or illness, and as a result, more than half require a job transfer, work restrictions, or take time away from their jobs. Approximately 8,000 workers are treated in emergency departments each day because of occupational injuries, and approximately 200 of these workers are hospitalized.

Millions of public safety employees (the responders that we expect to protect us all from natural or deliberate disasters) are outside the jurisdiction of federal OSHA entirely. Acts of gross negligence or criminal behavior leading to workplace deaths receive minimal punishment. Employees are discouraged from raising complaints about workplace hazards because the OSHA Act provides insufficient protections from retaliation.

Long after our nation declared safe and healthy workplaces to be a national priority, more attention is paid and more resources are devoted to fish and wildlife protection than worker safety. We work to strengthen the OSHA Act itself. This is the aim of the legislation that would greatly improve safety in the American workplace by ensuring that all workers are covered by health and safety laws, increasing penalties for those companies that break these laws, strengthening protections for whistleblowers, requiring employers to pay for necessary safety equipment at no cost to the employee, and enhancing the public's right to know about workplace safety violations.

Senator Ted Kennedy and Congresswoman Patricia Woolsey have introduced legislation to dramatically improve OSHA enforcement. “The Protecting America's Workers Act” (S.1244/H.R. 2049) when enacted will:

Protect public sector workers

• The bill would extend federal OSHA jurisdiction to firefighters, public safety officers, flight attendants, and workers in government agencies.

Increase penalties for those who break the law.

• Under current law, an employer may be charged, at most, with a misdemeanor when a willful violation of OSHA leads to a worker's death.

• The bill makes felony charges available for an employer's repeated and willful violations of OSHA that result in a worker's death or serious injury.

• The bill also updates OSHA civil penalties, which have been unchanged since 1990, and sets a minimum penalty of $50,000 for a worker's death caused by a willful violation.

Enhance the public's right to know about safety violations.

The bill improves public accountability and transparency by:

• Mandating the Department of Labor to investigate all cases of death or serious incidents of injury.

• Giving workers and their families the right to meet with DOL investigators.

• Requiring employers to inform workers of their OSHA rights.

Clarity an employer's duty to provide safety equipment.

• The bill clarifies that employers are required to provide the necessary safety equipment to their workers, such as personal protective equipment.
Work Zone Safety Training

David Coffey, TNEC Specials Project Manager with the Marketing Staff successfully assisted the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority (MWRA) in identifying training funding through the Massachusetts Department of Industrial Accidents (DIA). A partner in an informal coalition with MWRA and the MA Division of Occupational Safety (MA DOS), TNEC provided ten one day Work Zone Safety training sessions to MWRA employees, public agencies and municipalities. TNEC trained 250 workers under this initiative regarding ways to decrease worker injury and illness risks and incidents in and around construction work zones and in response to natural disasters and accidents. A dramatic rise in fatalities and injuries (Massachusetts rates slightly exceed the national rate in work zone construction) makes training crucial. NIEHS support to TNEC makes it possible to adapt current curriculum materials and provide this training. The DIA provides no curriculum development funding nor covers many other related training expenses. The MA DOS so valued this training that they want to continue offering additional training for 350 MWRA, public agency and municipal personnel not trained in the first round. TNEC received approval from DIA for a second round of funding to train the remaining 350 MWRA personnel.

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Tester Joins TNEC Staff

TNEC is pleased to announce a new staff member. Bridget McGuiness is a worker health trainer at The New England Consortium (TNEC) at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell. She has over 20 years of training experience having written, revised and presented courses for consultants, contractors and compliance inspectors in the asbestos and lead paint industries.

Ms. McGuiness has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Civil Engineering from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, MA. She has held numerous licenses and certifications including Asbestos Inspector, Management Planner and Worker; Lead Paint Worker, Moderate Risk Deleather; Residential Radon Measurement and Mitigation Professional; Residential Real Estate Inspector, Mold Inspector and the 40-hour HAZWOPER. Bridgett is qualified as a Certified Instructional Technologist (CIT): this is earned by experienced trainers through a rigorous application and testing process and a Certified Environmental, Safety and Health Trainer (CET).

She worked for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as an Environmental Engineer, has been self-employed and has worked for a social services agency. As a consultant Ms. McGuiness has provided expert witness services (asbestos-related) to federal and state government agencies and to private law firms. In addition she has several years of experience conducting residential real estate inspections and environmental testing and consulting (asbestos, radon, mold and lead paint).