

NIEHS Worker Training Program After 10 Years: Accomplishments, Challenges and New Directions

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The Historical Picture

Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970

OSHA "New Directions"

- * Training grants for unions and universities to do worker OHS training.
- * A modest program with lingering impact in institutional competency building and substantial growth in cadres of occupational health and safety professionals and trainers (see Labor Studies Journal, Spring 1981 for an overview of this program--Steven Deutsch, editor's introduction-- and issues).

Key Lessons From Abroad

Norwegian Work Environment Act of 1977; Swedish Work Environment Act of 1978 and the primary conclusion that worker education and activism is the most fundamental factor for reducing deaths, injuries, and illnesses at the workplace.

Lessons for Labor--Move From Reliance on Governmental Compliance Programs to Building OHS into Collective Bargaining and Workplace and Action Programs

Reaganism, Deregulation and the Changing Role of Government After 1981

NIEHS Hazardous Waste Training Program

1987 and a New Program and National Commitment with the Superfund

Results From the Largest Governmental Worker Training Program in Occupational Health and Safety in U.S. History

- * Large Numbers Trained
- * Building Competency--Expanding the Training Community and Institutional Training Capacity in Unions and Universities
- * Working with EPA
- * Working with DOE and Changing the Worksite Culture
- * The Making of a Trainer's Community and Workers as Trainers (see Steven Deutsch, "Building a Trainer's Community: Innovations in Worker Health and Safety Training," New Solutions, Spring 1996).

- * Changing Labor-Management Relations and Joint Approaches to Training and Work Environment Improvement

The Larger Context for the NIEHS Program

The Political Climate--OSHA Reform Act

Changing Workforce, Shifts in Occupational Structure and Work Done, Technological Change, and Realities of the Work Environment in the 1990s and Beyond Compared to Visions from the 1960s

State Legislative and Program Activities

- * State Mandates on Joint Labor-Management Health and Safety Committees
- * State Funded Programs on Worker OHS Training

The Challenge for Funding

The Swedish Work Environment Fund Concept With A Tax on Payroll: Envision A One Cent Per Hourly Wage for the Entire U.S. Workforce

"America's Choice: High Skill or Low Wages?"

The 1990 Skills of the American Workforce Commission report as a wage up call with renewed emphasis on worker skills training and the need to reduce costs, including health and safety related costs.

Joint Labor-Management Approaches to Workplace Health and Safety

- * “Win-win” philosophy promoted for mutual gains.
- * New emphasis on prevention strategies.
- * Ergonomics and prevention of musculo-skeletal injuries and illness.
- * Evidence of cost effectiveness in prevention and work environment improvement--management as promoters of working with unions and workers.
- * Linking employee involvement in occupational health and safety to broader issues of technological change and how work is organized.

Major New Initiatives By Organized Labor.

Creation of AFL-CIO Center for Workplace Democracy in 1997 to pursue a pro-active, union driven approach to union and worker involvement in more decisions on work restructuring, including work environment issues.

Summing Up NIEHS Achievements

Large Numbers of Persons Trained in 10 Years

Building Organizational Competency and Capacity

Expanded Numbers of Professional Trainers, Worker Trainers, Train-the-Trainer Programs to Continue Expansion

Curriculum Building and the Establishment of the Clearinghouse

Innovative Curricula and Multicultural, Multilingual, and Limited Literacy Materials

Expanding Training to Previously Undersevered Populations--Women and Minorities

Developing Innovative Ways to Assess Training

Continuing Impact and Spill-Over Beyond the Grantee Community

Challenges for Sustainability and the Years Ahead

Sustain and Support the Trainer's Community with Professional Training Development Opportunities and Exchanges

Encourage Institutional Commitment, Use of the Clearinghouse and Links to Other Governmental and Non-Governmental Activities in Occupational Health and Safety

Build More Links in Labor-Management Relations and Collective Bargaining and Private Policy

- * Strengthen contract language with employer commitment to training and released time for training, joint health and safety committees with real authority, and an active role for unions.
- * Promote the cost saving and prevention strategy for worker training and health and safety problem-solving.
- * Connect workplace health and safety training and activity to broader work restructuring agendas and make OHS more central to labor-management activities.

Public Policy and Political Action

- * Continue efforts to obtain OSHA Reform legislation and protect existing agencies and legislation.
- * Pursue state policy making, state legislation to support worker occupational health and safety training.
- * Nurture inter-agency cooperation so that OSHA, NIOSH, NIEHS, MSHA, EPA, DOE, DOT and others work in concert, are mutually supportive, and help to expand and sustain worker OHS training.