

Reducing Risk and Protecting Public Health Through Research and Training

April 3-4, 2008

Natcher Conference Center, NIH
Bethesda, MD



For 20 years, individuals and families, communities and businesses have benefited from the two Superfund programs of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). Superfund programs primarily address the environmental problems of hazardous waste sites. The NIEHS Superfund Basic Research Program has played a crucial role in addressing challenges posed by such environmental contamination including health risks, toxicity, exposure predictions, fate and transport, and the need for cost-effective treatments. The NIEHS Worker Education and Training Program has provided science-based safety and health training for nearly 2,000,000 workers who handle hazardous materials and waste or who respond to emergencies involving hazardous materials. Working in parallel, these two programs are a national asset providing the science and the training that is the foundation of environmental protection.

On April 3rd and 4th, 2008, at the National Institutes of Health campus in Bethesda, Maryland, the two NIEHS programs are holding a joint meeting to demonstrate the benefits of their work in protecting human health from hazardous substances. This conference will explore their strengths and interactions with the goal of enhancing collaboration among the institutions and organizations funded by the programs.

While the final goals and agenda for this conference will be developed by a planning committee consisting of NIEHS staff, grantees, federal partners, and individuals with knowledge of the NIEHS programs, the conference will address the following:

- The evolving nature of our knowledge of hazardous materials. During these past 20 years, our understanding of hazardous materials, indeed, even the definition of hazardous materials, has grown. For example, today we know much more about asbestos and the mechanisms that may lead from exposure to chest and abdominal cancers and lung diseases. We understand the risks of even low exposures and what this might mean to clean-up workers and their families. Thus the conference will consider the science of hazardous materials and where additional scientific research, such as environmental and biological indicator studies, might lead us.
- The partnerships that NIEHS has developed with federal Superfund agencies. The success of the NIEHS programs has not occurred in isolation from the overall federal Superfund response; rather, success came by collaborating with the Environmental Protection Agency, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, among others. The conference will examine these partnerships while considering areas for ongoing or future collaboration.
- The relationship between NIEHS and local communities. A core value of the NIEHS programs is their concern for and involvement with environmentally threatened communities. The conference will therefore review the nature of this relationship: the translation from research to clean-up; the rebuilding of Brownfields communities (Brownfields are real properties contaminated by hazardous materials); the effort to provide training to disadvantaged and minority citizens from these communities; and the NIEHS response to national crises such as the September 11 attacks and Hurricane Katrina.

In short, by reflecting on 20 years of work in this field, the conference will identify key themes and directions for ongoing NIEHS Superfund work. Please join us in this effort. Mark the date and plan on attending.