

**POST-CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS
WORKSHOP SESSION SUMMARY
NIEHS NATIONAL TRAINERS' EXCHANGE
MARCH 2012**

1. Session Title and Presenters' Contact Information

“Surgical Masks are Not Respirators: Training to Abolish a Workplace Myth”

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2. Workshop Summary

Myths about health and safety are commonly found in many workplaces and can be obstacles to creating change that trainers must overcome. This can be difficult, especially for peer trainers, when recognized sources of information at a workplace support the myth. The objective of this skill building activity is to have trainers practice and evaluate approaches to countering health and safety myths using a common myth in healthcare and public safety workplaces. In many of these workplaces, workers are constantly exposed to the myth that surgical masks are a form of respiratory protection from airborne infectious disease, such as Tb or influenza. This myth is promulgated by many authorities within the healthcare workplace, including some doctors, infection prevention professionals, employers, local and state health departments and the federal CDC.

3. Methods

This exercise is a small group discussion designed to draw upon the expertise of the participants on the controversy about the use of N95 respirators vs surgical masks in healthcare to protect workers from airborne infectious disease. The instructor must be knowledgeable about the subject, versed in the specifics of issue, and experienced in leading a group discussion. Each participant is provided with an activity which is completed in their small group and then participates in a role play with the presenter. Each group is also provided with examples of N95 respirators and surgical masks.

A scribe is chosen from each group to record the key points and present in the report back.. The maximum class size should be no more than 25 to allow most participants to ask questions. The evaluation method is two forms included in the activity to record answers from each group. The first form is for comparing the various masks and N95s provided and the second is for preparing questions and responses for the role play report back.

NIEHS WETP National Trainers' Exchange: Training Today for a Safer Tomorrow

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The advantage of this method is that it engages the experience of the participants in a real world situation as the issue is explored by the groups.

4. Main Points

- Unfortunately, most participants were not from healthcare which limited somewhat the discussion from the small group activity.
- The presenter emphasized the need to develop the skill of asking questions and dissecting answers about health and safety issues, especially by persons outside of health and safety professions.
- The activity would have been improved by providing additional time and materials for reviewing the results of the first role play and having an additional round.

5. References

Brosseau L and , Berry Ann R. (2009) N95 Respirators and Surgical Masks. NIOSH Blog, October 14th, 2009. <http://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2009/10/n95/> .

6. Workshop Handouts/ Resources

Workshop Activity: Surgical Masks and N95 Respirators Comparison

OSHA factsheets: Respiratory Infection Control: Respirators Versus Surgical Masks (05/2009)