Home
Posts by Category
Posts by Month
About This Site
Search the blog
Search for:
Search
Categories
- 50th Anniversary Blog Series
- Additive Manufacturing
- Aerosols
- Aging Workers
- Agriculture
- Artificial Intelligence
- Asthma
- Aviation
- Back Injury
- black lung
- Bloodborne pathogens
- Cancer
- Cardiovascular Disease
- Chemicals
- Communication
- Construction
- COVID-19
- Cross Cultural Communication
- Dermal Exposure
- Drugs
- Ebola
- Economics
- Electrical Safety
- Emergency Response/Public Sector
- Engineering Control
- Engineers
- Environment/Green Jobs
- Epidemiology
- Ergonomics
- Exposure
- Falls
- Fatigue
- Fire Fighting
- Fishing
- Food Service
- Forestry
- Future of Work and OSH
- Healthcare
- Healthy Work Design
- Hearing Loss
- Heat Stress
- History
- HROOL
- Hydraulic Fracturing
- Impairment
- Infectious Disease Resources
- Influenza
- International
- Landscaping
- Law Enforcement
- Lead
- Manufacturing
- Media
- Mental Health
- Mining
- Motor Vehicle Safety
- Musculoskeletal Disorders
- Nanotechnology
- National Occupational Research Agenda
- NIOSH-funded Research
- Nonstandard Work Arrangements
- Observances
- Occupational Health Equity
- Oil and Gas
- Opioids
- Outdoor Work
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Policy and Programs
- Prevention Through Design
- Prioritizing Research
- Recycling
- Reproductive Health
- Research to practice r2p
- Researcher Spotlights
- Respirators
- Respiratory Health
- Risk Assessment
- Robotics
- Safety
- Safety and Health Data
- Sensors
- Service Sector
- Silica
- Sleep
- Small Business
- Smoking
- Social Determinants of Health
- Spanish translations
- Sports and Entertainment
- Stress
- Suicide
- Synthetic Biology
- Systematic review
- Take Home Exposures
- Technology
- Temporary/Contingent Workers
- Total Worker Health
- Training
- Translations (other than Spanish)
- Transportation
- Uncategorized
- Venomous Snakes
- Violence
- Wearable Technologies
- Wholesale and Retail Trade
- Women
- Work Schedules
- Workers' Compensation
- Workplace Medical Mystery
- World Trade Center Health Program
- Young Workers

The History and Future of NIOSH Morgantown

Posted on April 21, 2014 by Tanya Headley, MS and Katie Shahan, JD

The state-of-the-art NIOSH Morgantown facility opened in 1996.

To commemorate Workers Memorial Day, NIOSH is hosting a week of blogs with a new post each day ending on Monday, April 28th. To start us off, we will highlight the past and look to the future with a retrospective on the history of occupational safety and health research and NIOSH in Morgantown, West Virginia.

Occupational safety and health research has deep roots in Morgantown. In 1967, the Appalachian Laboratory for Occupational Respiratory Diseases (ALFORD) was created within the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) to focus on a prominent problem of the Appalachian occupational environment–"black lung disease" in coal miners. ALFORD's director was Dr. W. Keith Morgan. The lab was initially housed in the West Virginia University (WVU) Health Sciences Center, and its research focused on detecting black lung disease and assessing its physiological effects. In 1969, work began on a new facility for ALFORD on 4.6 acres of land donated by WVU to PHS. In the same year, the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969 (Coal Act) was passed. The Coal Act mandated a range of measures to protect coal miners, including limits on coal mine dust exposures and a program providing medical screening with chest radiographs to coal miners at operators' expense.

After the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act was passed in 1970 (creating both NIOSH and OSHA) ALFORD became part of NIOSH. ALFORD was assigned responsibilities found both in the OSH Act and the Coal Act, including responsibility for health hazard evaluations in mines and management of the Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Program. ALFORD's new building was dedicated on November 27, 1971, with Senator Robert C. Byrd as the principal speaker. Senator Byrd continued to be an avid supporter of NIOSH research until his death in 2010. The new building was initially called the Appalachian Center for Occupational Safety and Health (ACOSH). Later in the decade, its name was changed to the Appalachian Laboratory for Occupational Safety and Health (ALOSH). An interesting note is that the cornerstone of this facility serves as a "time capsule" holding sections of diseased human lungs from black lung victims, along with copies of the OSH Act and copies of legislation related to black lung and coal workers' pneumoconiosis (CWP).

August 1975 brought a new director of ALFORD, Dr. James Merchant. In 1976, ALFORD became the Division of Respiratory Disease Studies (DRDS). The addition of industrial hygiene to DRDS precipitated the expansion of research in areas other than black lung such as byssinosis in non-textile cotton workers, asbestos exposure in crushed stone quarries, exposures for cement workers, exposures to oxides of nitrogen, diesel emissions in coal mines, beryllium workers, and persons working with new energy technologies such as coal liquefaction, coal gasification, and refuse derived fuels.

In 1977, safety research activities in ALOSH were expanded, and the NIOSH Division of Safety Research (DSR) was created to serve as the focal point for the Nation's research program for preventing occupational injuries. The first DSR director was Mr. John Moran. The Testing and Certification Laboratory was organized in the new DSR and included respirator certification activities and research as specified in the Coal Act of 1969. Respirator certification and research were later moved to DRDS in 1996 and then incorporated into the NIOSH National Personal Protective Technology Laboratory in Pittsburgh in 2001,

In 1996, the NIOSH Morgantown facility expanded, and ALOSH opened a 167,000 square-foot state-of-the-art research facility that would house new safety engineering laboratories and the newly created Health Effects Laboratory Division (HELD). The first director of HELD was Dr. Albert Munson, who is still the director today. HELD was created to expand and update NIOSH's bench laboratory research capabilities and to recruit researchers who could make new scientific contributions in the area of occupational safety and health.

Current Research

Today, the NIOSH facility sits on the original 4.6 acres of land just beside the West Virginia University medical campus. The name ALOSH is now rarely used, and the sign outside the facility says CDC/NIOSH. From a staff of 20, NIOSH/Morgantown has grown to approximately 600 employees over the last four decades reflecting a steady increase of responsibilities.

DSR continues to serve as the focal point for the Institute's traumatic occupational injury research program under its director, Dawn Castillo. DSR's programs are organized around the public health approach to occupational injury prevention, including emphases on injury surveillance, epidemiology, intervention evaluation, and protective technology engineering. Specific programs include falls prevention and protection, motor vehicle safety, workplace violence prevention,, fire fighter fatality investigations and prevention, Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE), and childhood agricultural injury prevention. DSR's state-of-art engineering labs have contributed to technologic advances over the last decade, including new and more sophisticated data on worker's body dimensions that are being used by manufacturers to design work equipment that better fits today's workers. DSR's virtual reality laboratory provides researchers with the capability to realistically simulate dangerous work environments and conduct cutting edge research that would otherwise not be possible because of risks to human subjects.

DRDS continues to provide national and international leadership toward the identification, evaluation, and prevention of occupational respiratory diseases under its director, Dr. David Weissman. DRDS provides the Nation with information about the burden of work-related respiratory disease, so challenges can be identified and progress tracked. DRDS also conducts research relevant to a wide range of occupational respiratory diseases including work-related asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, flavoring-related lung disease, chronic beryllium disease, and coal workers' pneumoconiosis. DRDS also conducts several activities mandated by federal regulations. These include health hazard evaluations with a focus on occupational respiratory diseases, the Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Program, and the NIOSH Spirometry Course Certification Program. DRDS also continues to modify its research to meet changing needs. For example DRDS is currently leading the transition of medical radiographic screening for occupational respiratory diseases from older film-based technology to digital chest imaging and developing methods for using longitudinal measurement of pulmonary function with spirometry for early detection of occupational lung disease.

HELD continues to focus on establishing the causes of occupational disease and injury and to contribute to the development of valid strategies of intervention and prevention. Science disciplines are represented among branches of allergy and clinical immunology, biostatistics and epidemiology, exposure assessment, engineering and control technologies, pathology and physiology, and toxicology and molecular biology. HELD also continues to evolve and address changing needs in research. HELD uses research teams from its diverse scientific disciplines to work on emerging issues such as nanoparticle exposures or the potential threat of pandemic flu for health-care workers. To address complex questions about flu transmission, HELD bioengineers are using newly developed aerosol samplers and chambers with coughing and breathing machines, computer modelers are modeling how aerosols from coughs are generated and dispersed, and molecular biologists are using highly sensitive molecular techniques to detect and quantify virus in the air samples to validate the samplers and computer models. All of these combined are changing the understanding of the transmission of the virus in the healthcare setting.

Researchers throughout NIOSH Morgantown are changing the future of occupational safety and health research while building on the rich and important history. We are proud of the over 40 years of community partnership and ongoing national leadership in preventing work-related illnesses and injuries. Future blogs will highlight NIOSH research in other cities across the country.

Tanya Headley, MS and Katie Shahan, JD

Ms. Headley is a health communication specialist in the NIOSH Office of Health Communication and Global Collaborations.

Mrs. Shahan is a health communication specialist in the NIOSH Office of Health Communication and Global Collaborations.

This blog is based on material originally published in NIOSH eNews August 2010

Posted on April 21, 2014 by Tanya Headley, MS and Katie Shahan, JD
Categories History, Policy and Programs

3 comments on "The History and Future of NIOSH Morgantown"

Comments listed below are posted by individuals not associated with CDC, unless otherwise stated. These comments do not represent the official views of CDC, and CDC does not guarantee that any information posted by individuals on this site is correct, and disclaims any liability for any loss or damage resulting from reliance on any such information. Read more about our comment policy ».

Eru says:
April 24, 2014 at 2:53 pm
Great and danger thing. NIOSH have advantage and disadvantage

Reply

Zeshan says:
March 11, 2015 at 5:57 pm
Glad I found your site. This is an eye-opener for NIOSH Morgantown history. I never thought about this before, thanks for bringing this one up. Rest assured that what you shared will be taken into consideration. I enjoyed reading your blog.

Reply

CFMedia says:
November 18, 2015 at 10:24 am
Congratulations for all the cooperation offered and it stays that way for long. Great job

Reply

Post a Comment

Your email address will not be published.

Comment

All comments posted become a part of the public domain, and users are responsible for their comments. This is a moderated site and your comments will be reviewed before they are posted. Read more about our comment policy.»

Name

Email

Post Comment

Page last reviewed: January 5, 2021
Page last updated: January 5, 2021
Content source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention