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PB90131897

Statement of

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SPRINGFIELD, VA 22161

**Before the
Subcommittee on Energy, Environment, Safety and Research
House Committee on Small Business**

May 25, 1977



Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss our research and technical assistance programs on occupational safety and health problems of small businesses. More than 87 percent of the nation's businesses employ 25 or fewer employees, representing over 14 million workers. These small businesses are of particular concern to us because although they handle a wide variety of toxic chemicals and hazardous physical agents, the employers and employees are not generally well-informed about the precautions necessary to avoid harmful exposures. I am accompanied by Dr. Bobby J. Gunter, Industrial Hygienist for the NIOSH regional office located in Denver, Colorado. After I read a brief prepared statement, Dr. Gunter will show a series of slides he has taken during visits to small plants and discuss the assistance he has been able to provide employers in identifying and controlling occupational hazards.

NIOSH was established by the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 to conduct programs of research, standards development, technical assistance and manpower development. One of the Institute's most important responsibilities under this act is to transmit recommended standards to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in the Department of Labor. The NIOSH recommendations are intended to serve as the basis, along with other available information, for assisting OSHA in developing new standards and in supplementing approximately 400 consensus health standards, consisting only of an environmental limit, that were promulgated when the act was passed.

NIOSH has transmitted more than 60 criteria documents recommending new health standards to the Department of Labor. These criteria documents include an environmental limit for workplace exposure, as well as

recommendations on the use of labels and other forms of warning, type and frequency of medical examinations to be provided by the employer, sampling and analytical methods, procedures for technological control of hazards, and suitable personal protective equipment.

In addition to criteria documents, under a joint Standards Completion Program with OSHA we have developed draft technical standards for most of the consensus health standards. These draft standards supplement the existing environmental limits with procedures for informing employees of hazards, monitoring techniques, engineering and control mechanisms, and medical surveillance programs. We will be publishing five documents late this year summarizing in non-technical language the information we have developed under this program. These handbooks should assist employers in protecting their workers from exposure to OSHA-regulated chemicals.

Although our primary effort has been directed toward developing recommended health standards, we are also assisting OSHA in revising the approximately 1,200 existing consensus safety standards. We have recently consolidated our safety program in Morgantown, West Virginia. An important part of that program is the Testing and Certification Branch, which evaluates and reports on a wide range of personnel protective equipment. NIOSH has found that all too often such equipment fails to protect workers. Most employers, especially small businessmen, have no way to determine the adequacy of equipment such as hard hats or safety goggles until a tragic accident occurs.

A vital part of our research program is getting information to those who can put it to good use, especially workers, employers, and occupational safety and health professionals. This year we will issue over 100 different NIOSH publications. Among these is a series of health and safety

guides specifically targeted on small businesses. These guides, which are widely distributed to affected businesses, cover such diverse establishments as auto repair and body shops, foundries, and sporting goods stores, and give general health and safety guidelines and provide a check list of applicable OSHA regulations. We also have a series of good work practices manuals for workers in different occupations. Another publication designed to be used by workers, businessmen, and other laymen is a non-technical version of a scientific conference on occupational cancer.

We also conduct health hazard evaluations at the request of employers and employee representatives. Under this program we investigate a workplace, collect environmental samples, make toxicity determinations, and provide medical examinations for workers. The results of these investigations, including recommendations for work practices, personal protective equipment, and engineering controls, are reported back to plant management, employee representatives, and OSHA.

Earlier this month we held a workshop on "Development of Clinic-Based Occupational Safety and Health Programs for Small Businesses." The purpose of the workshop was to assist small businesses that need occupational safety and health services but may not have resources, expertise, or facilities to accomplish this on their own.

Despite our efforts we recognize that employers and employees are still not generally informed about occupational health hazards. Between 1972 and 1974 NIOSH conducted a National Occupational Hazard Survey to determine the extent of worker exposure to chemical substances and physical agents. Visits were made to 4,636 workplaces selected to provide a representative cross section of industry type and size. The NIOSH teams

collected general information about each plant, such as its major product or service, the number of employees, and the availability of medical, industrial hygiene and safety engineering services. They also recorded the number of workers in each job category potentially exposed to chemical and physical agents.

In conducting this survey we learned that the companies surveyed were often not aware of the chemical composition of the substances used in their plant. Over 70 percent of the exposures identified were recorded as trade name products for which the chemical composition was not known to the company. Although we have contacted more than 10,000 manufacturers, to date we have determined the chemical composition of only slightly more than half of these trade name products. Most businesses are faced with the problem of handling toxic substances whose chemical composition and health effects are not known to them. Our survey indicates that small businesses are least well equipped to deal with them. Although approximately half of the small businesses with 25 or fewer employees we visited had safety engineering services, only about 2 percent had any industrial hygiene services and one percent had programs to monitor the presence of fumes, gases, mists, and noise. Only twenty-seven percent of the establishments had employees with first aid training to provide emergency treatment, and only fifteen percent had formally established safety committees.

Dr. Gunter will show a series of slides of small businesses he has visited in conducting health hazard evaluations and providing technical assistance. Carcinogens are used in many small factories including those making snow skies, and boats. Other slides show health hazards in small factories producing hand tools, farm machinery, wood and steel furniture, plastic pipe coating, extruded plastic articles and the painting and paint

manufacturing industry. As you will see, workers and often employers in these establishments were exposed to a large number of toxic chemicals, including those known to cause cancer.

Mr. Chairman, Dr. Gunter and I will be pleased to answer any questions you or members of your Subcommittee may have.

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		1. REPORT NO.	2.	3. PB90-131897
4. Title and Subtitle NIOSH Testimony on Small Business by J. F. Finklea, May 25, 1977		5. Report Date 77/05/25		
		6.		
7. Author(s) NIOSH		8. Performing Organization Rept. No.		
9. Performing Organization Name and Address NIOSH		10. Project/Task/Work Unit No.		
		11. Contract (C) or Grant(G) No. (C) (G)		
12. Sponsoring Organization Name and Address		13. Type of Report & Period Covered		
		14.		
15. Supplementary Notes				
<p>16. Abstract (Limit: 200 words) This statement concerned the efforts made by NIOSH in the area of research and technical assistance programs offered on occupational safety and health problems of small businesses. In addition to Criteria Documents prepared by NIOSH, a draft technical standards for most of the consensus health standards has also been prepared. These draft standards supplement the existing environmental limits with procedures for informing employees of hazards, monitoring techniques, engineering and control mechanisms, and medical surveillance programs. A major part of the effort at NIOSH was in the dissemination of information to the employers and employees who can put the suggestions and recommendations into practice, thus reducing the hazards in the work place. Guides for small businesses have been specifically developed for such widely different areas as auto repair and body shops, foundries, and sporting goods stores. A series of good work practices manuals was available for workers in different occupations. Health hazard evaluations were conducted at the request of employers and employee representatives. Workshops have been held on specified topics of interest to small businesses. Even so, there were still many businesses where the employer and the employees were operating in the dark regarding work place hazards and steps to take in alleviating them. Studies have indicated general lack of knowledge when it comes to identifying the ingredients in materials used at the place of business. Carcinogens were frequently found in small shops including those making snow skis and boats.</p>				
17. Document Analysis a. Descriptors				
<p>b. Identifiers/Open-Ended Terms NIOSH-Publication, NIOSH-Author, NIOSH-Testimony, Finklea-J-F, Industrial-health-programs, Occupational-health-programs, Worker-health, Hazardous-materials</p>				
c. COSATI Field/Group	REPRODUCED BY			
18. Availability Statement	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE NATIONAL TECHNICAL INFORMATION SERVICE SPRINGFIELD, VA. 22161		19. Security Class (This Report)	21. No. of Pages 8
			22. Security Class (This Page)	22. Price