

## Closing Comments

By Richard A. Lemen, Ph.D.

Acting Director, NIOSH

**DR. BENDER:** Well our closing remarks are going to be made by Richard A. Lemen, Ph. D.. Dr. Lemen is the acting director of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. He has been in that position as acting director of NIOSH since just August 1, 1993. He was the deputy director of NIOSH since August, 1991. And prior to this he was the assistant director of NIOSH, Washington office and that was from October, 1988 to August, 1991. He was the director of the Division of Standards Development and Technology Transfer, which is known as DSDTT, from June, 1980 to September, 1988. He has served NIOSH in a variety of management positions over the last 25 years. He is the author of many scholarly publications including joint editorship of the book, *Dust and Disease*. He received his BA degree from Central Methodist College where he was named a distinguished alumni in 1987. He has a master's degree in epidemiology from the University of Missouri and a Ph.D. in epidemiology from the University of Cincinnati. Let's welcome to the podium, Dr. Lemen.

**DR. LEMEN:** It is truly a pleasure to be here. As I was coming in the room and talking to some of the people in the back of the room, they said, "You know, the amazing thing about this group of people is that they seem to be really willing and are working together." And I think that is one of the best compliments that anybody can make about a group of people like this.

I am sorry I could not be here for the whole conference. I am happy to be here to end the conference.

I would like to thank a few people that were very instrumental in putting this conference together - Mel Myers, who I am sure all of you had an opportunity to talk to, Tim Groza, and Betty Dryden in the back of the room, and also to Rosemary Cianfracco from the Division of Safety Research for helping with the audio-visual materials. And I would like to thank the Southeastern Center for

Agricultural Health and Injury Prevention for all the support they have given throughout this conference in helping NIOSH put this conference on.

We have a strong commitment in the Institute to agricultural safety and health. These activities represent a major part of our budgetary process.

I, personally, have an interest in agricultural health because I grew up in an agricultural community in Missouri and spent many, many hours working on the farm as a child and as a teenager and as a college student. I haven't been back to work on a farm since then because I took another career channel. But I certainly remember all of those early years in my in a farming community, working with farmers.

Many of you are probably aware that September 19 - 25 has been designated as this

year's National Farm Safety and Health Week. This week we will observe the 50th anniversary of the health and safety concerns of American farmers.

The emphasis this year will be on the child, on tractor safety, and on chemical safety. I think that it is very appropriate to include the child and you have heard much about that during this conference. The theme they have chosen for this year's observance is Safety and Health - Agriculture's Future. This theme seems, to me, very appropriate considering the rapid approach of the year 2000.

It is difficult to judge, at this time, what is going to happen in the 21st century and what farming is going to be like in. But it is likely that the agricultural community will still be facing many of the hazards they face today. We will continue to need safety and health intervention and prevention programs well into the next century and probably for many centuries to come.

This conference has been an important forum, both on examining our progress and for looking ahead to the future needs of agriculture. If we are going to improve agricultural safety and health in the 21st century, it is crucial that we continue to plan for the future.

At NIOSH, we are doing this through a transformation process that we began about a year ago. We are trying to transform the Institute to make it a better science Institute, to make partnerships with people like you, to make the Institute more efficient, and to assure realization of our mandate which is to provide a safe and healthy workplace for all the workers in this country.

We are striving to enhance, the way we do business in NIOSH. Through conferences like this, we are building not only our internal structure but also those with partners outside of NIOSH.

Over the last year, we at NIOSH have developed a vision that we hope will direct our activities and research into the next century. That vision is "delivering on the nation's promise: safety and health at work for all people... through prevention."

We have also compiled a list of values that we, at NIOSH, hope to use in working with our partners and within the Institute. These values include honest communication, trust, mutual respect, humility, personal responsibility, caring, meaningful work, integrity, commitment and fairness. We hope that we can instill these values in all the individuals that work in our Institute so that we can perform better in the areas of excellence in science, excellence in service, advocacy, and in developing new partnerships.

In striving to develop these new partnerships, we want to include as many partners to NIOSH as we can. You are important partners to us and we want to work with you. We need your assistance to help us transform NIOSH into an organization that will go into the 21st century and provide the science, the advocacy, and the honest communication that is needed in presenting and preventing worker safety and health problems in this country.

This process is going to begin publicly on September 22 when the NIOSH Quality Counsel and the NIOSH Board of Scientific Counselors hold the first meeting. At this meeting we are going to invite partners of

NIOSH to come and tell us how they feel NIOSH should operate in the future. The NIOSH staff and I have been hearing from a number of people around the country expressing the needs of farmers and their families. We want to hear clearly what you need and we want to be able to address these needs in our research program, in our prevention program, and in our role as an advocate for you to the United States Congress, to the White House, and to other entities where change can be made.

We also want to continue our partnerships with people like Marilyn Adams, Kelley Donham, James Merchant and those of you that have participated in the NCASH. These people have specifically expressed concern about the health and the safety of children on farms. For this reason I am proud of NIOSH, I am proud that we play a role in funding a number of these programs dealing with children.

Children are still often neglected in the workplace - you have heard about this in this conference. Historically, NIOSH has tried to reach out to these workers and those people facing occupational hazards. I am proud of NIOSH that we have included children in these processes. It is crucial that all of us committed to agricultural safety and health continue to emphasize community participation. We also must continue to address the migrant health worker issues. We need to have more effective programs in this area.

It is our obligation, I think, as occupational safety and health researchers to actively involve the farm workers, and their families, in our efforts to prevent disease, injury and death in their working environment. So I

hope you have all enjoyed this conference. I hope you have all gotten something out of it that you can take back home. But, most importantly, I hope that this conference has been an avenue where honest communication and active participation by all has occurred. We want to continue meeting with you on a periodic basis. With the help of the NIOSH staff, and participating Division Directors, we will continue our commitment to agricultural safety and health. We want to include you in helping us transform NIOSH and making it more responsive to your needs and to the needs of America's workers. So, thank you very much and have a safe trip home. I hope I have eliminated a little stress by not keeping you until 11:30 so you can catch your planes. Thank you all.

#### *Comments*

**DR. BENDER:** Thank you, Dr. Lemen. Any final things -- any final instructions, housekeeping, anything else?

**MR. MELVIN L. MYERS:** One is a hazard that we hadn't really recognized at NIOSH before and that is something mud. And mud was in two ways -- heard about two fatalities in turns of towing people out of the mud. Several people shared their own stories about being towed out of mud. Heard about one chain that broke and went back through a tractor window and caused a ruptured spleen. Mud is an issue that we just did not have on any of the information that you found -- that we had as a handout here. That was a new revelation in terms of a hazard.

Secondly, the mud issue is one that came across as something the farmers are not --

you can't get the crops out this year. You probably can't even get them in next year. Saturated soil means that we are going to go over the whole winter probably frozen. Soil, water in the soil next spring will be still saturated. A normal rainfall next year could lead to more flooding. So there is probably going to be two years of lost crops which I don't think people, the society has really recognized yet. So it is going to be a long term thing and the stress stuff we have been hearing about becomes very important.

I talked to Dave Baker who came in yesterday from Missouri and Dave said there are three things that are real important. One is to deal with the stress thing as soon as we can, because it is going to be there. Number two, are those strange problems that one sees after a flood, things that we at NIOSH have been working on in terms of indoor air, is just one aspect of that, is the fungal spores are going to be all over as this flood recedes. The third thing is for NIOSH to somehow connect through Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) so that more NIOSH expertise is available at the local level when they make the call to FEMA. For those who want a report on those observations are very meaningful.

**DR. BENDER:** Alright, that is the end of this session and the end of the conference. I wish you bon voyage. Thanks for all your help and participation.

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AMONG AGRICULTURAL WORKERS**

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