



## NIOSH HHEs on CD-ROM

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## IH Interface

# NIOSH HHEs on CD-ROM

William J. Daniels and Stanley Salisbury, Column Editors

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Reported by Richard Hartle

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NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) was established by the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970. NIOSH is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and is the only federal institute responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related illnesses and injuries. The Hazard Evaluations and Technical Assistance Branch of NIOSH conducts HHEs (Health Hazard Evaluations), to determine whether there is a health hazard to employees caused by the workplace, in response to concerns expressed by employees, employee representatives, employers, other federal agencies, or state and local governments. In addition to determining health outcomes from excessive exposure to chemical and biological agents, the HHE program also evaluates other potentially hazardous working conditions, such as exposure to heat, noise, radiation, or musculoskeletal stresses. This NIOSH branch currently employs 50 professional and 17 support staff, including industrial hygienists, engineers, occupational physicians, and epidemiologists. The central office is located in Cincinnati, Ohio; field offices are located in South Dartmouth, Massachusetts, Atlanta, Georgia, and Denver, Colorado.

Because the resources of the Health Hazard Evaluations Program are insufficient to provide site visits to all establishments from which requests are received, senior HHE program staff review the requests and evaluate them with respect to reported exposures, reported health effects, previous HHEs in similar workplaces, the likelihood

of finding the causes for the reported health effects, the probability that the reported health effects are due to the workplace, and previous evaluations by other agencies. To date, site visits have been conducted for approximately half the nearly 10,000 HHE requests (the program currently receives 300–400 HHE requests/year). “Formal” final reports (formally printed and available through NTIS) are typically prepared when results/recommendations from an HHE have potential impact on an audience wider than the visited facility; the remainder of on-site investigations are reported in letter format, and sent directly to the employer and employees.

The formal final reports are preceded with a “Summary” presenting the basis for the HHE request, range of environmental and/or medical results, and significant findings. At the end of this section is a statement on whether a health hazard was determined, and keywords. The body of the reports is arranged by sections: Introduction, Background, Methods, Evaluation Criteria, Results, Discussion, Recommendations, and References. More than 2500 formal final HHE reports have been written since the HHE program was initiated in 1971.

To increase the availability/ease of access to these HHE reports, NIOSH recently undertook development and distribution of a Health Hazard Evaluations CD-ROM. The initial release in July, 1977, is contained on a two-disc CD-ROM set (DHHS [NIOSH] Publication No. 97-144) and is the full text of 505 Health Hazard Evaluation formal final reports completed from 1990 through 1996. The second release in August, 1998, is also contained on two CD-ROMs (DHHS [NIOSH] Publication No. 98-138) and contains the full text of 1198

formal final reports completed from June 1981 through 1989. A limited number of complimentary copies are available from NIOSH. You can e-mail your request to [PUBSTAF@CDC.GOV](mailto:PUBSTAF@CDC.GOV), fax your request to 513-533-8573, or call 800-35-NIOSH. Once this supply is exhausted, inquiries will be directed to NTIS or the Government Printing Office.

The CD-ROMs were created by scanning a printed copy of each page and using optical character recognition (OCR) to create an electronic text of that page. Each page of electronic text was then linked to the actual image (picture) of that page. When searching the CD-ROMs, you actually search the electronic text created by the OCR software. Because OCR processing is not 100 percent accurate, the OCR may introduce some errors into the electronic text. These errors may be especially noticeable in older documents whose pages had poor print quality. *On these CD-ROM sets, only the actual page images are the official versions of the Health Hazard Evaluations.* These images are accessible directly from the corresponding electronic text using the “Image Viewer” feature.

Because of the amount of storage space necessary for images, the complete collection of documents could not be stored on a single disc. Therefore, each set contains two discs. Each document is identified on the discs by a three-part name: HHE number, site identification information, and site location. Each disc is independent and must be searched separately. After initial installation, the discs can be used in any order. Each disc contains only those documents indicated on its label and an index specific to the documents on that disc. When you insert a different disc, you will have to re-enter

your search parameters to search that disc.

The software used to search the NIOSH Health Hazard Evaluations CD-ROMs is a Windows-based program called Pundit\*, which is contained on the CD-ROM discs. Summary instructions for loading Pundit appear on the back cover of the CD jacket. All of Pundit's features are described in detail in the *Pundit User's Guide* (DHHS [NIOSH] Publication No. 96-130). Pundit contains a variety of features that facilitate use of the discs. For example, a list of all the documents on each CD-ROM can be automatically generated using the "Browse" option. The "fuzzy search" capability and the "Vocabulary" option can be used to overcome some of the errors

introduced by the OCR process. Once you have retrieved the document you want, you can view the electronic text using the Text Viewer Window. The corresponding image pages can be viewed and scrolled through like a book using the Image Viewer Window. The electronic text of the documents can be viewed and saved with word processing software using the "Launch" option. The software on the CD-ROM can run on any computer that supports Windows version 3.1, 3.11, or Windows 95. However, performance will be sluggish on any computer less than a 386DX 33MHz with a 2X CD-ROM drive. Approximately 5 megabytes of free disk space are needed to install Pundit. A mouse is recommended but not required.

Once a sufficient number of post-1996 Health Hazard Evaluations are completed, another HHE CD-ROM will be released. There is no plan to compile/distribute HHE reports prior to 1980. Other tentative plans include scanning, review, and compilation of substantive "letter" HHE reports—that is, those letters which contain results and recommendations useful to the occupational health community, that for various reasons were not reported in a "formal" format. Finally, the ultimate goal is to make all of this information available on the Internet in a searchable format. Because it is available on the CDC intranet using the CD-ROM/Pundit technology, hopes are high that a "jump" to the worldwide web is forthcoming.

\* Pundit was developed by HGO Technology, Inc., under a contract with NIOSH. Pundit was written using development software from ZyCO International, portions copyright© 1996 ZyCO International. Pundit may not be duplicated. Windows® is a registered trademark of Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA.