

Western States Occupational Meeting
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List of Terms and Abbreviations

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE)

Mountain and Plains Education and Research Center (MAP ERC)

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

Occupational Health (OH)

Occupational Health Indicators (OHIs)

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

Training Project Grants (TPG)

Western States Division (WSD)

Western States Occupational Network (WestON)

Abstract

The Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) has been collaborating with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Western States Division (WSD), and the Mountain and Plains Education and Research Center (MAP ERC) for over eight years in Denver, Colorado to successfully convene and maintain the Western States Occupational Network (WestON), primarily through annual meetings, resource sharing, and ongoing communication among various collaborating partners. The past six years of WestON Meetings have been supported by NIOSH under the R13 conference grant award mechanism.

The overall aims of the WestON project are to:

- Build capacity among the 19 Western states to conduct surveillance of work-related injuries and illnesses, and implement epidemiological capacity in occupational health (OH) at the state level.
- Develop common priorities for occupational risk assessment, applied epidemiology, worksite interventions and other prevention efforts.
- Promote scientific collaboration among state-based occupational epidemiologists, NIOSH and academic colleagues in the Western region.

Each year, WestON brings together 60-80 participants from the 19 Western States: NIOSH-funded Education and Research Centers (ERCs), Agricultural Centers, and Training Project Grants (TPG); NIOSH Divisions and Branches; Federal, State and Tribal agencies; public health scientists; trainees (students, fellows and residents); and policymakers to present and exchange ideas in a relatively small and informal setting that is conducive to the germination of ideas and collaborative activities.

Over the past eight years, WestON topics have moved beyond basic concepts of surveillance to setting strategic priorities for interventions in the Western region and engaging a wider array of partners. Examples include:

- Collaboration with the NIOSH WSD to track and investigate oil and gas fatalities, a strong interest of several states expanding beyond the Western States. Pennsylvania is partnering with Colorado due to the work that has emerged out of WestON activities.
- Alaska expressed that the meeting provided practical examples of cutting edge occupational epidemiologic work being performed in other states that may be useful in Alaska.
- Successfully hosted multiple Association of Environmental and Occupational Clinics Occupational Health Internship Programs in Western States, which facilitated the exploration of emerging OH hazards and further development of state occupational surveillance systems.
- Introduced digital storytelling to more effectively communicate about various OH issues, including a collaboration between the California Department of Public Health and the Center for Digital Storytelling that led to an OH-focused digital storytelling workshop for aging nurses.
- Several states comment on the breadth of networking opportunities for collaboration and partnerships the WestON network enables, such as interactions with experts from NIOSH, OSHA, ERCs, TPGs, medical and preventive health clinics, academic institutions, and private sector businesses.

The model of the WestON meeting is based on the concept that “regional” identification of common issues can help support the development of occupational epidemiology capacity in states that historically have not had commitment or funding in this core area of public health. The WestON meeting is an important part of a larger coordinated effort to build a nationwide public health system in all states to track, investigate and prevent work-related injuries and diseases.

Project Title

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Specific Aims

The overall aims of the Western States Occupational Meeting (WestON) project are to:

- Build capacity among Western states to conduct surveillance of work-related injuries and illnesses, and implement epidemiological capacity in occupational health (OH) at the state level.
- Develop common priorities for occupational risk assessment, applied epidemiology, worksite interventions and other prevention efforts.
- Promote scientific collaboration among state-based occupational epidemiologists, NIOSH and academic colleagues in the Western region.

Significant Key Findings / Major Accomplishments

1. Build capacity among Western states to conduct surveillance

The Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE), in collaboration with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Western States Division (WSD), and the Mountain and Plains Education and Research Center (MAP ERC), convened the eighth annual Western States Occupational Network (WestON) Meeting on September 17-18, 2015 in Denver, Colorado. The goal of this meeting was to build state-based occupational epidemiology and surveillance capacity in the Western states with a focus on developing partnerships with other agencies and vulnerable populations, and identifying issues of particular importance for the western region.

The formal evaluation results demonstrated the average overall rating of the meeting as a 3.8 (on a 4-point scale of 1-Poor, 2-Fair, 3-Good, and 4-Excellent), which is consistent with the positive ratings of the WestON meeting over the years of the project period. Presentations from the 2015 meeting that attendees reported had the most impact were the National Public Radio keynote address on Injured Nurses – How to Humanize an Epidemic as well as the presentation on the OSHA-STEPS-NIOSH Alliance in Oil and Gas Extraction for engaging in new partnerships and producing results. A recently introduced format for presentations, “Quick Takes,” continued to effectively showcase a greater number of projects and updates through brief 5-minute presentations, which were again unanimously well-received by evaluation respondents.

An organizing committee of CSTE members and staff; state and NIOSH representatives, and the Director of Outreach at the MAP ERC met via teleconference monthly to plan the annual meeting and finalize the agenda. State Epidemiologists from the Western states were invited by the CSTE National Office to identify one occupational epidemiologist (or an individual in their state with this interest or primary responsibility) to attend the meeting. Priority for sponsored travel in 2015 was given to the 12 of 19 Western states that are not funded under the NIOSH/state cooperative agreement for occupational safety and health surveillance (ID, NV, UT, AZ, ND, SD, KS, NE, WY, OK, AK, and HI). In addition, representatives from the Western NIOSH ERCs and Agricultural Centers and TPG recipients were invited each year. Representatives from several CDC branches and divisions with surveillance activities including the NIOSH Western States Division; Office for State, Tribal, Local, and Territorial Support; Division of Respiratory Disease Studies; Division of Safety Research; and the Center for Workers' Compensation Studies attended the meeting.

2. Develop common priorities

The WestON network was established to provide much-needed occupational safety and health capacity building in the Western US. The WestON meeting allows for a diverse range of partners to hear about the work other colleagues are doing as well as collaborate to form or develop partnerships to enhance current efforts. To highlight examples from the 2015 meeting, Day 1 began with updates from NIOSH, including a welcome and talk by NIOSH Director, Dr. John Howard. Additional Day 1 sessions included a keynote address on injured nurses, several Workers' Compensation-related presentations, and QuickTakes presentations on zoonotic diseases, transportation, international lead poisoning, and safety funds. Day 2 sessions focused on teamwork and partnerships among various sectors and populations in the West, such as the Oregon Young Employee Safety Coalition, the NIOSH American Indian/Alaska Native Workshop, and evaluation of drycleaning shop solvents. The day wrapped up with a synthesis of the meeting discussions and further facilitation of the continued capacity building among Western region states.

3. Promote scientific collaboration among colleagues in the Western region

The WestON meetings consistently have strong attendance with diverse professionals represented from across the 19-state western region. Over 80 professionals attended the 2015 meeting, including

representatives from 16 of the 19 western states (except KS, AK, and HI), Western region ERCs, Agricultural Centers, Training Project Grantees (TPG), Western and Midwestern universities, medical clinics, private sector businesses, and the National Public Radio (NPR). Approximately 22 NIOSH staff from several divisions attended as well as an OSHA representative.

The WestON meeting enables attendees to discuss common issues and brainstorm solutions with other western states. The meetings over the years have highlighted numerous successful projects and models for other states, including:

- New state proposals for CDC/NIOSH State-Base Surveillance applications, such as Arizona and Montana.
- Through a collaborative effort of the AZ State Department of Health Services and the University of Arizona, AZ completed the CSTE Occupational Health Indicators for their state and launched a dedicated OH website: <http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oh/occupational-health>. They noted that WestON strengthened their collaboration and that the meeting was “extremely helpful in providing practical approaches and was also very useful for identifying strengths and weaknesses of results.”
- Helped develop the *Improving Worker Safety and Health among American Indians/Alaska Natives: Partnership Workshop* in August 2015 in Aurora, CO. The workshop provided partnership opportunities and discussion related to improving Worker Safety and Health among American Indians/Alaska Natives.
- Collaborated with the NIOSH Western States Division to track and investigate oil and gas fatalities, a strong interest of several states expanding beyond the Western States. Pennsylvania is partnering with Colorado due to the work that has emerged out of WestON activities.
- Oregon noted WestON has helped to collaborate with partners in studying impacts to wildland fire fighters.
- Colorado formed new partnerships related to occupational risks in the marijuana industry as a result of WestON.
- Alaska expressed that the meeting provided practical examples of cutting edge occupational epidemiologic work being performed in other states that may be useful in Alaska.
- Successfully hosted multiple Association of Environmental and Occupational Clinics Occupational Health Internship Programs in Western States, which has facilitated the exploration of emerging OH hazards as well as further development of state occupational surveillance systems.
- Introduced presentations on digital storytelling to more effectively communicate about various OH issues, including a collaboration between the California Department of Public Health and the Center for Digital Storytelling that led to an OH-focused digital storytelling workshop for aging nurses.
- Several states comment on the breadth of networking opportunities for collaboration and partnerships the WestON network enables, such as interactions with experts from NIOSH, OSHA, ERCs, TPGs, medical and preventive health clinics, academic institutions, and private sector businesses.
- Many states noted that the meeting provided helpful information about funding opportunities they may not have been made aware of otherwise, including successful grant applications and being able to utilize the network and small funding opportunities to achieve positive public health outcomes.

Dissemination and Translation of Meeting Accomplishments

Participant contact information is shared at the meeting and through follow-up email communication to continue the collaborations that occur through the annual meetings. For example, the WestON Oil and Gas Workgroup convened an inaugural meeting on June 26, 2015 in Cheyenne, WY as a follow-up to previous WestON meetings, where oil and gas hazards and fatalities have been repeatedly discussed as concerns requiring additional attention. Furthermore, CSTE continues to maintain the WestON listserv of over 100 individuals to communicate with meeting participants, share news items of interest and plan for subsequent meetings. The CSTE website provides information on WestON and links to each meeting agenda and minutes (<http://cste.site-ym.com/group/WestON>). Additionally, WestON meeting presentations are available on the MAP ERC website (<http://www.ucdenver.edu/weston>) and will soon be available on the CSTE website as well.

Public Health Impact

Each year, evaluation responses to the WestON meeting have been overwhelmingly positive, and there is substantial interest in participating in additional meetings. Given the strength of the collaboration with NIOSH and the MAP ERC, CSTE has successfully applied for and received a U13 conference grant award to continue

with WestON meetings. The next WestON meeting will be held September 29-30, 2016 in Denver, CO. The format for the 2016 meeting will be a series of presentations, Quick Takes sessions, and a keynote speaker from NPR to continue with the successful structure of the meeting and planning process.

As a tool to build epidemiological capacity in states, the WestON meeting is an innovative approach that brings together more experienced states and states that are just beginning to consider developing an occupational epidemiology program. As signified above, new relationships and partnerships are formed as a result of participating in this meeting. The NIOSH Western States Division has been an integral part of planning WestON meetings and helping to develop ties between NIOSH and state health departments. Participation from NIOSH-funded ERCs and Agricultural Centers provides an innovative opportunity for discussion about collaboration between academic and state-based occupational epidemiology programs, including the existence of funding opportunities. The meeting highlighted numerous successful projects, models, and partnerships that can be used by many states in the western region. In fact, the southeastern states have followed the WestON model to have successfully received its first R13 NIOSH conference grant for CSTE to formalize and establish regular SouthON meetings for 2016-2020. The WestON model has proven to be a successful approach with notable public health impact in regional and national occupational health and safety.

Publications

N/A

Project-Generated Resources

N/A