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Occupational Injury Risk Assessment: Perspective and Introduction to the Second Special Issue

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Risk assessment continues to be an important process for collecting and describing the evidence regarding the potential of exposure to a particular hazard to induce adverse responses. Workers often experience much higher exposures to hazards than the general population and thus are worthy of special attention. Injuries in the workplace are frequent and result in great impact to the lives of the workers affected. In addition, workplace injuries also impose high economic costs on industries with high exposures to hazards. During 1980 to 1997, there were an average of 16 work-related deaths per day (CDC 2001).

A recent workshop "Future Research for Improving Risk Assessment Methods: Of Mice, Men, and Models" focused on Occupational Injury Risk Assessment as a high research priority (Zeise *et al.* 2001). This workshop was sponsored by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, US Environmental Protection Agency, American Chemistry Council and United Auto Workers. Invited participants from a wide diversity of interests identified Occupational Injury Risk Assessment as the second highest priority, with general agreement that research on this topic has the potential to reduce deaths, disability and suffering from occupational injury.

In this second special HERA issue devoted to Occupational Injury Risk Assessment, there is an emphasis on specific situations that demonstrate the success of risk assessment techniques to reduce occupational injuries. Several of the papers demonstrate the application of risk assessment methods to prevent injuries through maintaining safer workplaces and reducing individual injury risks. Other papers represent advances in methods of evaluating the level of risk in various industries and occupations or new paradigms for identification of risk. Some of the research

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in this issue is specifically intended to address special groups such as older workers, teenage workers, construction and agricultural workers. Other papers exploit data sources not previously available or provide comparisons of different data sources for fatal and non-fatal events, or compare work-related events to national data on all events.

It remains the hope of the co-editors, that this special issue, like its precursor, sponsored by the Division of Safety Research, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, will continue to advance the application of risk assessment methods to reduce the incidence of workplace injuries and improve the public health.

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