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Teaching Health and Safety to Young Workers

Colorado Program Reaches Students in Grades 7 through 12

BY ROBERTA SMITH AND REBECCA J. GUERIN

Has your AIHA local section ever tried to increase awareness on a common issue? In 2018, the AIHA Rocky Mountain Section (AIHA-RMS) did just that with Safety Matters, a free educational program from NIOSH and AIHA that raises awareness among young people about workplace safety and health. This is important because national data indicate that young workers (defined as those aged 15–24 years) experience higher rates of work injuries that require treatment in hospital emergency departments when compared to adult workers over the age of 25.

Young worker injuries are also an important public health concern in Colorado. According to Pinnacle Assurance, Colorado's largest workers' compensation insurer, 380 Colorado teens sustained workplace injuries in 2018. To address this challenge, the rich network of health and safety professionals in Colorado was leveraged to become trained on the delivery of the Safety Matters module and to disseminate the program within their local networks.

Safety Matters, a one-hour, interactive teaching module targeted to students in grades 7 through 12, is designed to introduce young people to foundational workplace knowledge and skills that all young people should have before entering the workforce. Volunteers can use the teaching module to inform students that all workers can be injured, become sick, or even be killed on the job; that most work-related injuries and illnesses are predictable and preventable; and that employers are responsible for, and workers have the right to, safe and healthy work. Students also learn how to identify workplace hazards and gain an understanding of hazard-control strategies; how to respond to a workplace emergency; and how workers can communicate with others—including

people in authority—when they feel unsafe or threatened.

The Safety Matters materials are based on a full, free curriculum called Youth@Work-Talking Safety that NIOSH and its partners developed for implementation in schools. While Talking Safety is intended for use by teachers in school systems, Safety Matters allows community members to bring

A grassroots approach was a great way to build relationships with youth organizations.

the message of workplace health and safety to school districts that haven't implemented the full curriculum or to introduce the topic of workplace safety and health into younger grades than the curriculum is being taught.

In July 2018, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environ-

ment (CDPHE) Occupational Health program, along with AIHA-RMS and the Colorado Chapter of the American Society of Safety Professionals, initiated a pilot project around youth worker safety with the Safety Matters program as the core. With CDPHE as the lead agency, this effort received one year of funding through a Research to Practice Grant from the NIOSH Mountains and Plains Education and Resource Center.

The most immediate goal of the Colorado pilot project was to present Safety Matters in a focus-group format to three established youth advisory councils. These councils exist in many Colorado communities to give input about local policy initiatives and issues affecting young people related to public health and the environment. Other goals of the pilot project were to train a minimum of ten safety professionals, representing different geographic regions in Colorado, on the Safety Matters program; present the Safety Matters module to at least six youth programs identified through the focus groups; and evaluate changes in the young participants' knowledge of and attitudes about workplace safety and health topics.

LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE

The pilot project's instructors wanted to learn about young peoples' perspectives on young worker safety, get feedback



SAFETY MATTERS ON AIHA.ORG

To access additional resources related to the joint AIHA/NIOSH Safety Matters program, visit the Safety Matters Center at <http://bit.ly/safetymatterscenter>.

about their work experience, and hear their ideas on how the Safety Matters program could be disseminated. Two focus groups were held at meetings of established youth advisory boards with members in grades 7 through 12. The meetings were held in Denver with the Youth Partnership for Health (YPH), a youth advisory council for state, local, and community stakeholders, and in Fort Collins. The YPH was created to ensure that the needs of young people are considered in programs and policies that affect them. The Fort Collins youth advisory board gathers information from local youth and other groups, organizations, and agencies regarding youth-oriented issues.

Participants in these sessions were eager to share their thoughts on young worker safety. They suggested training other students as peer trainers on the Safety Matters program; creating a YouTube channel for students to watch the program on their own; and presenting the program during school homeroom sessions or at organizations such as afterschool programs and Future Business Leaders of America conferences.

TRAINING THE TRAINERS

Train-the-trainer sessions were arranged by advertising to AIHA-RMS and ASSP Colorado members to solicit interest in learning about the program. Even though Safety Matters has a step-by-step, easy-to-follow instructor’s guide, two-hour train-the-trainer sessions were held to provide an overview of the goals of the project and coach presenters

on how to deliver the module and disseminate it within their local networks. Each session included a youth advocate from CDPHE who advised the health and safety professionals on how to talk to young people. Overall, four training sessions were held in various locations along Colorado’s Front Range area. In total, 36 health and safety professionals were trained to deliver the Safety Matters program.

DISSEMINATING THE MESSAGE

Once volunteers were trained on Safety Matters, we matched them to organizations that requested the program. Presentations were delivered to the Colorado Springs YMCA, the Buckley Air Force Base-Keystone Leadership Program, regional and state conferences of the Colorado Future Business Leaders of America, the Boys and Girls Club of Weld and of Freemont County, and the Weld County Workforce Center. During the pilot study, eight of the 36 trained safety professionals conducted 12 presentations up and down the Front Range of Colorado, reaching more than 300 young workers.

EVALUATING THE PROGRAM

To evaluate students’ knowledge of and attitudes about workplace safety and health topics covered in the module, we collaborated with researchers in the NIOSH Safe-Skilled-Ready-Workforce Program. Questionnaires were administered to all participating students before and after the training sessions. Results from preliminary analyses suggest



that the 279 participants who completed both a pre- and post-session questionnaire demonstrated statistically significant changes after receiving the Safety Matters program in both their knowledge about workplace safety and their attitude toward the importance of workplace safety.

SHARING LESSONS LEARNED

This project provided a forum for the local chapters of AIHA-RMS and ASSP to work together and to include other stakeholders in the process. Through the presentations, youth participants increased their knowledge of safety issues and changed their opinion on the importance of safety in the workplace.

Using a grassroots approach was a great way for the AIHA-RMS to build

relationships with youth organizations. The Future Business Leaders of America and Workforce Center forums were new opportunities for health and safety professionals to connect with youth. Future outreach opportunities on careers and health and safety may be possible with both organizations. The Safety Matters program can be conducted easily without much training on the presenter’s behalf. We also learned that many young people don’t carry pens—we needed to provide these so students could complete the evaluation forms.

We hope to continue to present Safety Matters to local youth organizations to ensure that health and safety is one of their priorities as they enter the workforce. 📌

RESOURCES

- NIOSH: “Talking Safety,” <http://bit.ly/talkingsafetyniosh>.
- Pinnacol Assurance: “Summer Job Safety Strategies for Teens,” <http://bit.ly/pinnacolteen> (PDF).
- The Synergist*: “Teenagers Are Injured at Twice the Rate of Adult Workers,” <http://bit.ly/synsafetymatters> (August 2016).



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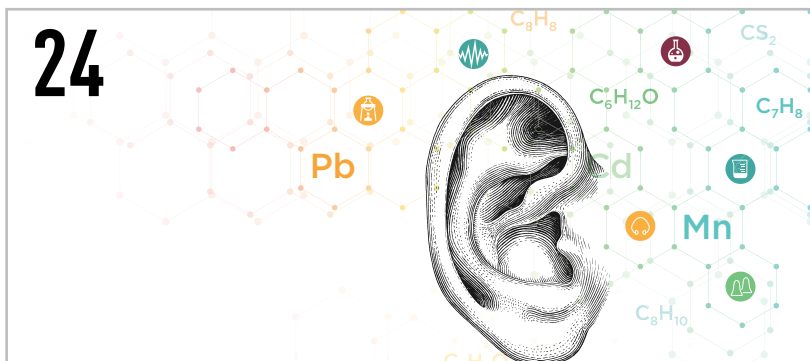


THE OTHER HYGIENISTS

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE DENTAL INDUSTRY

Dentists and dental personnel face unique occupational exposures, including bacteria, viruses, dusts, gases, radiation, and other respiratory hazards. In addition, many dental offices are small employers that may be exempt from some OSHA requirements. What does all this mean for dental workers when it comes to workplace hazards?

BY JOHN MARTINELLI, DAVID BRINKERHOFF, AND MICHELLE ROSALES



OTOTOXICANTS AND HEARING IMPAIRMENT
THE CHALLENGE FOR OCCUPATIONAL HYGIENE

Noise has traditionally been considered the primary risk factor for hearing loss. However, recent evidence suggests that exposures to chemicals commonly found in industrial environments may affect hearing alone or in combination with noise exposure.

BY N. CODY SCHAAL

SEALING THE DEAL

THE ROLE OF THE EHS PROFESSIONAL DURING AN ACQUISITION

Your company has decided that its financial performance supports “inorganic growth,” or making an acquisition. But the board of directors is concerned about environmental, health, and safety sustainability and the need to avoid assuming unknown EHS liabilities. As the EHS professional, you will play a key role in this process.

BY LORRAINE SEDLAK, THOMAS E. CASE, AND ALIZABETH ARAMOWICZ SMITH



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