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The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

Promoting productive workplaces
through safety and health research 

NIOSH eNews



Director's Desk



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Volume 18, Number 8 (December 2020)

From the Director's Desk

John Howard, M.D. Director, NIOSH

Recognizing 20 Years of NIOSH Support for Atomic Weapons Workers

The NIOSH Division of Compensation Analysis and Support (DCAS) will mark its 20th anniversary next year. The Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act of 2000 (the Act) was enacted to provide compensation and medical benefits to former and current atomic weapons workers (or their survivors). Under the Act, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services gave NIOSH the task of estimating occupational exposure to ionizing radiation (dose reconstruction) and the associated responsibilities for overseeing that portion of the program. In 2001, NIOSH established DCAS, which is primarily responsible for dose reconstruction for individual workers with cancer who filed claims for compensation.

For two decades, NIOSH has developed and supported the rules and procedures, and their revisions and changes, as former workers and their families have filed compensation claims. Working with these unique challenges remains rewarding 20 years later, as the division continues helping workers and their families.

The hazardous jobs that some of these workers performed started with the Manhattan Project during World War II. At that time, the understanding of the effects of radiation exposure on humans and the protection needed to prevent injury and illness were not fully understood. As the work expanded beyond the development and testing of the first atomic bomb,

workers from all over the country started to serve in many different specialized jobs and support roles during the Cold War. Most of these Cold War veterans worked in obscurity. Work continues to this day in the form of cleanup efforts and maintaining existing facilities across the nation.

Since 2001, dedicated DCAS staff members have worked with other government agencies to administer the compensation program to help thousands of workers. Because the work associated with the past and present of this industry continues, so does the work that DCAS performs in support.

As DCAS turns 20 next year, it will have completed nearly 53,000 dose reconstructions and associated tasks, such as providing claimant services and worker outreach, with other cabinet departments and agencies. The Act continues to contribute to worker safety and health today beyond the work of the compensation program. For more information on DCAS and its efforts to help workers and their families, visit the [DCAS webpage](#).

Research Rounds

Inside NIOSH:

Lung Transplants Increasing for Work-related Diseases

Lung transplants for work-related lung diseases are increasing, highlighting the need for prevention among high-risk workers, according to research published in the journal *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*.

Work-related lung diseases can be severe and life-threatening and can progress even in the absence of additional exposure. They are also entirely preventable. These lung diseases are caused by inhaling harmful substances, such as coal mine dust, which causes black lung disease, also called coal workers' pneumoconiosis. Other work-related lung diseases include silicosis from silica dust, asbestosis from asbestos fibers, hard metal pneumoconiosis from metal particles, and ongoing beryllium disease from beryllium and its compounds.

Understanding where these diseases occur is critical to prevention. To learn more, researchers reviewed records in a national organ transplant registry to identify lung transplants for work-related lung diseases. They discovered that 230 adults received a lung transplant for these lung diseases from 1991 to 2018. Most of the transplants occurred after 2009, indicating that lung transplants for work-related lung diseases are increasing.

By type, black lung disease accounted for most of the lung transplants, with 79 transplants, followed by silicosis, with 78 transplants. By age, transplant recipients with metal pneumoconiosis were the youngest, on average, at nearly 49 years, while those with asbestosis were the oldest at 62 years. By state, West Virginia accounted for most of the lung transplants for black lung disease, with 31 transplant recipients, followed by Kentucky with 23, and Virginia with 10. Lung transplants for silicosis were highest in Pennsylvania, followed by West Virginia.

The study also looked at survival after a lung transplant. At 8 years on average, transplant recipients with asbestosis survived the longest, followed by nearly 8 years for transplant recipients with silicosis and nearly 7 years for those with black lung disease. Collecting work histories through the national transplant registry could help improve case identification and prevention, according to the researchers.

More information is available:

- [NIOSH Pneumoconioses](#)
- [NIOSH Occupational Respiratory Disease Surveillance](#)

Outside NIOSH:

New Survey Uncovers Construction Safety

Commercial construction companies often must demonstrate safety performance before bidding for business contracts. Safety performance traditionally includes injury records, workers' compensation claims, and future risk. However, these indicators are limited in their ability to predict future safety.

Policies, programs, and practices for workplace safety and health are considered more accurate indicators, because they are the underlying causes of injury and illness. These so-called leading indicators now are used more frequently for safety surveys to prequalify for contract bidding, but the accuracy of these surveys is unproven.

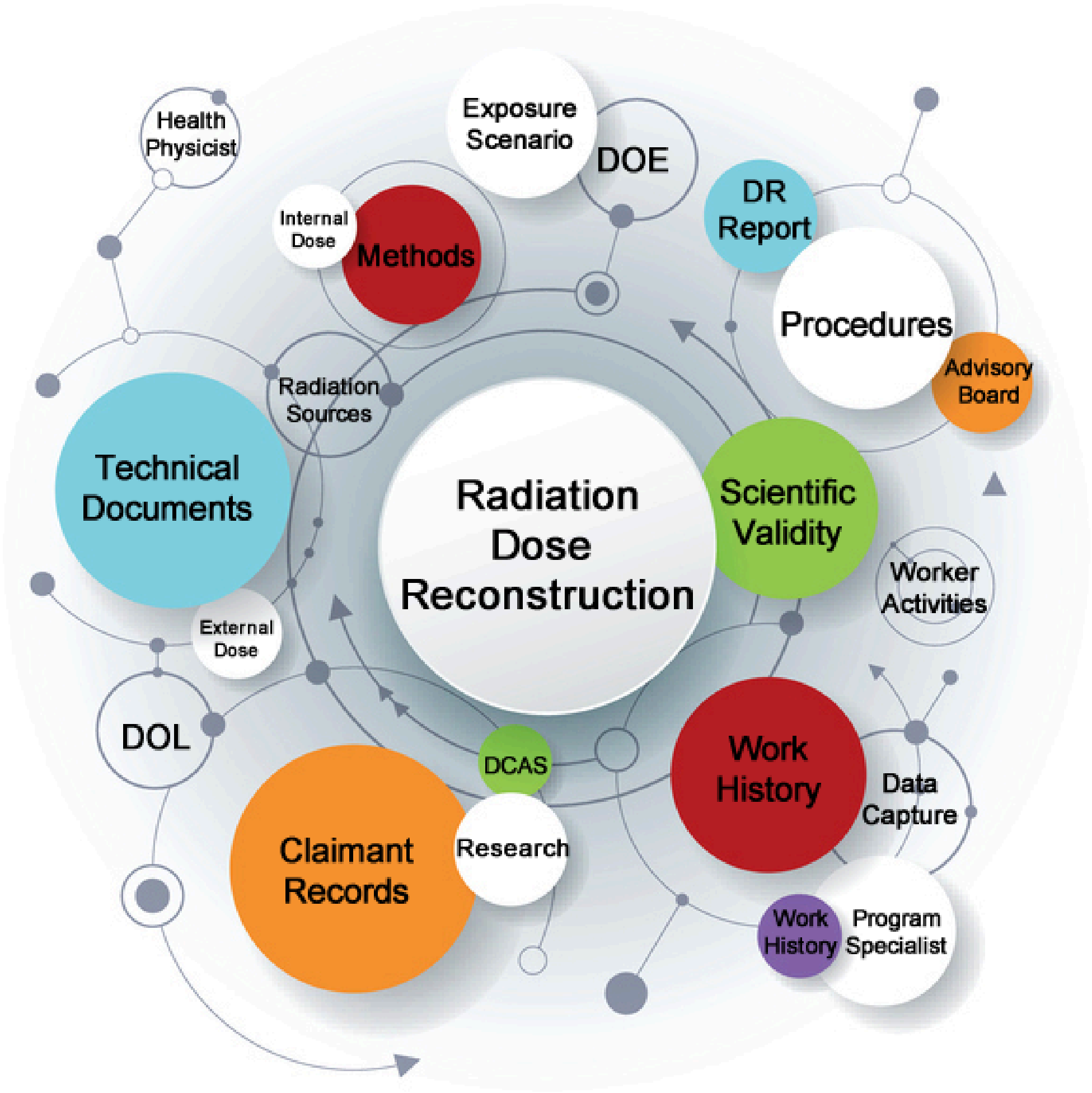
To address this issue, the NIOSH-funded construction center CPWR—The Center for Construction Research and Training supported a study by researchers at Northeastern University in Boston. The scientists developed and tested a new 63-item survey of construction safety policies, programs, and practices.

As part of a larger research project, 43 subcontractor managers on 24 construction sites in the Boston-metro area completed the new survey. At the same time, researchers administered separate surveys focused on safety climate and injury rates to 1,426 workers at the same sites and then compared the results. The study occurred between January 2017 and August 2018.

Researchers found that higher survey scores of the leading indicators were linked to worksites with greater safety climate and lower injury rates. Construction sites and their projects appeared more critical in increasing safety than specific subcontracting companies. With each 1-point increase in the new survey's score, worksite safety climate and subcontractor safety climate rose. These findings highlight the overall importance of construction worksites for worker safety and health and of improving safety performance surveys for prequalification. The study appeared in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* [↗](#).

More information is available:

- [Assessing Leading Indicators of Safety Performance Through an Organizational Survey](#)  [↗](#)
- [Development and Evaluation of Metrics for Contractor Pre-Qualifications](#) [↗](#)
- [NIOSH National Center for Construction Safety and Health Research and Translation](#)



This image depicts the components of reconstructing radiation doses. Image from Thinkstock.

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Highlights

COVID-19 Update

As part of NIOSH’s efforts to keep our stakeholders up to date on the CDC and NIOSH COVID-19 response, here is a summary of new information available.

- A new [scientific brief](#) highlights evidence that cloth masks help to block virus-carrying respiratory droplets from reaching others when the wearer has COVID-19. Cloth masks can also help block the amount of virus-carrying droplets that a mask wearer inhales if someone nearby is infected.
- The [workplaces and businesses webpage](#) was updated to provide one central location for all work-related COVID-19 resources.
- A new [infographic](#)  provides tips to ensure that employers and employees are prepared to assist when a COVID-19 case is identified in the workplace. The infographic is a part of the recommendations provided for [COVID-19 Case Investigation and Contact Tracking in Non-Healthcare Workplaces: Information for Employers](#).
- The [critical infrastructure sector response planning](#) webpage as updated to reflect new scientific evidence, evolving epidemiology, and the need to simplify the assessment of risk.
- New school resources are also available:
 - The Cleaning, Disinfection, and Hand Hygiene in Schools [toolkit](#) is now available to aid school administrators as they consider how to protect the health, safety, and wellbeing of students, teachers, other school staff, families, and communities and prepare for educating students.
 - The [school health personnel webpage](#) provides information and resources to help school nurses and other healthcare personnel perform these new roles and responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Resources for self-care are also included

Effective Interventions to Combat Opioid Misuse: Studies From the Field of Opioid Prescription Management

Join experts from the NIOSH Total Worker Health Program and the Center for Workers' Compensation Studies as they discuss findings from a recent report on the State of the Field in Opioid Prescription Management. The webinar will be held on December 10 at 12 pm (ET). [Register](#)  now!



Funding Opportunity: NIOSH and U.S. Coast Guard Announce Commercial Fishing Occupational Safety Research and Training Grants

Six million dollars in funding is now available to support research on improving the occupational safety of workers in the commercial fishing industry and critical training for this high-risk occupation. The fishing occupational safety research cooperative agreements and training project grants will provide up to 50% of an organization's costs, ranging from \$150–\$975 thousand per grant. Read about the research ([RFA-OH-20-002](#) ) and training ([RFA-OH-20-003](#) ) grant funding opportunities. The deadline to apply for both grants is January 21, 2021.

NIOSH Continues Funding to Protect Children From Agricultural Hazards

NIOSH recently [awarded](#)  a competitive grant renewal to the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety, located at the Marshfield Clinic Research Institute in Wisconsin. The Center will receive 6-7 million dollars over 5 years and will use this funding to continue its mission to enhance the health and safety of all children exposed to hazards associated with agricultural work and rural environments. The National Children's Center is one of 11 NIOSH-supported [Centers for Agricultural Safety and Health](#).

CDC Awards \$1.5 Million for Research in Robotic Technology to Reduce Exposures to Workplace Hazards

CDC has awarded \$1.5 million over 3 years to the University of Illinois at Chicago and Worcester Polytechnic Institute to fund projects aimed at reducing workers' exposures to hazards through the development and use of collaborative robots, or co-robots. NIOSH partnered with the National Science Foundation (NSF) to fund co-robot studies in the workplace through NSF's [National Robotics Initiative 2.0](#) . The Initiative supports U.S. research that will accelerate this emerging robotic technology that complements, not replaces, human workers. Read the full [press release](#).

NIOSH Congratulates



NIOSH Honored at Annual Federal Laboratory Consortium Meeting

The NIOSH National Personal Protective Technology Laboratory staff Jonathan Szalajda, Frank Palya, and Lee Greenawald, along with scientists and engineers from the Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Army, recently received the [2020 Interagency Partnership Award](#)   from the Federal Laboratory Consortium Mid-Atlantic Region. Their project, “CBRN Canister Protection Capabilities Against Emerging Chemical Hazards,” showed that NIOSH-approved chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) canisters continue to protect emergency responders against the latest identified chemical and radiological threats. The team also developed a standardized, technology-based methodology to conduct future CBRN hazard assessments—an important scientific advancement.

Monthly Features

New Communication Products & Reports

FACE Report

- [Construction Firm Owner Dies From Fall From 8-Foot Step Ladder or Overhead Platform— Michigan](#)

Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program Report

- [While Maneuvering Outside His Apparatus, Firefighter Falls Into Roadway and Is Struck and Killed by a Delivery Van— Texas](#)

Health Hazard Evaluation Report

- [Evaluation of Potential Exposure to Illicit Opioids During an Emergency Medical Services Response](#) 

Program Performance One-Pagers

- [Occupational Health Equity Program](#)
- [Center for Construction Research and Training \(CPWR\)](#)
- [National Center for Productive Aging and Work](#)
- [Center for Maritime Safety and Health Studies](#)
- [Healthcare and Social Assistance Program](#)
- [Construction Program](#)

Skin Notation Profiles

- [Cyclonite](#)
- [Cyclohexanone](#)
- [Diethylenetriamine \(DETA\)](#)
- [Cyclohexanol](#)
- [Chlorodiphenyl \(42% Chlorine\)](#)

NIOSH Science Blog

- [Can Exoskeletons Reduce Musculoskeletal Disorders in Healthcare Workers?](#)
 - [Jobs and Exposures That Increase Risk for Developing COPD Later in Life](#)
 - [Working From Home: How to Optimize Your Work Environment and Stay Healthy](#)
 - [A Physico-chemical and Toxicological Evaluation of Fracking Sand Dusts](#)
-

Federal Register Notice

Advisory Board on Radiation and Worker Health (ABRWH) Public Comment and Meeting

The [notice](#) was posted on November 5. The meeting will be held on December 8–9.

A National Elastomeric Half Mask Respirator (EHMR) Strategy for Use in Healthcare Settings During an Infectious Disease Outbreak/Pandemic

The [notice](#) was posted on September 13. Comments must be received by December 14.

Proposed Data Collection Submitted for Public Comment and Recommendations: Factors Influencing the Transmission of Influenza

The [notice](#) was posted on October 13. Comments must be received by December 14.

Proposed Data Collection Submitted for Public Comment and Recommendations: Blood Lead Surveillance System (BLSS)

The [notice](#) was posted on October 13. Comments must be received by December 14.

National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA)

Save the Date! The 2nd Annual Stand-Down to Prevent Struck-by Injuries in Construction is April 26, 2021

Struck-by injuries are the leading cause of nonfatal injuries and the second most common cause of fatalities among construction workers. Read this [NIOSH Science Blog](#) for more information. Interested in joining our NORA Construction Sector Council Preventing Struck-by Injuries/Fatalities Workgroup? Email [Scott Earnest](#).

News from Our Partners

Video Highlights the Importance Heat-related Illness Prevention for Farm Workers

The Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (WCAHS) released a new video for farm owners highlighting the importance, feasibility, and economic benefits of providing effective heat-related health and safety protections for their workers. WCAHS developed the video as part of the California Heat Illness Prevention Study, which is a NIOSH-funded research and outreach effort. It is available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#). WCAHS is one of 11 NIOSH-funded [Centers for Agricultural Safety and Health \(Ag Centers\)](#).

Call for Workshop Proposals: the VPPPA 2021 Safety+ Symposium

Voluntary Protection Programs Participants Association (VPPPA) is looking for creative, fun, and relevant workshop proposals on safety knowledge for their symposium. Selected proposals will be presented during a 45-minute workshop. The deadline to [submit](#) is February 12, 2021.

New Publication on Sleep Disorders and Physician Burnout

A new article, *Association of Sleep Disorders With Physician Burnout*, features findings from a larger NIOSH extramural (grant-funded) study examining the effects of work shifts on physicians. The article appeared in the [Journal of the American Medical Association](#). For more information on NIOSH extramural activities, visit [Extramural Research and Training Programs](#).

Health Literacy Courses

If you're new to health literacy, need a refresher, or want to train your entire staff, the partner courses on the CDC [Health Literacy webpage](#) are a good place to start. From plain language to shared decision-making, from culture and communication to consumer and patient skill-building, the courses are a great way to improve your health literacy.

Call for Proposals: 31st Annual Art & Science of Health Promotion Conference

The Art & Science of Health Promotion Conference has reopened the deadline to [submit proposals](#) for its Intensive Training Seminars. The conference is looking for experienced speakers with compelling topics that will engage health

promotion professionals for their two-day seminars. The deadline is January 31, 2021.

Conferences, Meetings, Webinars, & Events

This page provides a list of publicly available occupational safety and health-related [conferences, meetings, webinars, and events](#) sponsored by NIOSH as well as other government agencies, and nongovernment agencies, such as universities, professional societies, and organizations.

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Page last reviewed: December 1, 2020