



Real-life safety committees

Who they are, how they work

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2010
Save a friend. Work safe.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT
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high school students

Deadline:
February 15, 2010

www.orosha.org/psacontest/



RESOURCE

Oregon Health and Safety Resource is published every other month by the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Division of the Department of Consumer and Business Services.



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and Business Services**

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On the cover (from top, clockwise): Shawn Roland and Tracy Dupuis of West Coast Shoe Company; metal pouring at Sandvik.

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Administrator's message

The biggest hazard is complacency

By Michael Wood

The last full week of September, I participated in an event that forced me to spend a bit of time thinking about the future.

"Oregon's Workplace Health and Safety: Looking Forward to 2020" was co-sponsored by Oregon OSHA and the Center for Research in Occupational and Environmental Toxicology at Oregon Health Sciences University. Along with the other participants, I had the chance to hear from John Howard, who has just been reappointed to head the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

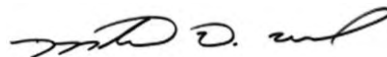
Given all the advanced degrees and serious thinkers in the room, it may be surprising that the biggest thing I took away from the meeting was an even stronger respect for the dangers of complacency. We heard about a number of significant and important issues – but our primary challenge in addressing them will continue to be in mustering the commitment, enthusiasm, and even outrage to do so.

With the director's announcement that the workers' compensation pure premium rate is expected to decline again beginning in 2010, we here in Oregon have achieved 20 straight years of flat or declining premium costs. That's a record of which we are justifiably proud. And we did it, at least in part, by recognizing that the best way to reduce the costs of a workplace injury claim is to avoid the injury in the first place. During the past two decades, we have seen injury rates, as well as fatality rates, decline steadily. That's the secret to our success.

When I closed the "2020" conference, I told those gathered in the room that I believed we can indeed be proud of our record. I told them that Oregon has clearly done well compared to most other states. But I also told them that before we are too proud of achieving an "A" for our activities, we should remember that we reached that level only because we are being graded on the curve.

Comparative benchmarks are important, and they can be very useful. But if being at or near the top of the curve leads us to believe we've done everything we can and should do, the comparisons can be downright dangerous. Because we all know that there continue to be Oregon workers needlessly exposed to serious injury, illness, and death. Every week, I see reports of accidents that should not have occurred. We do better than most. But we do not do all we should.

I believe the time has come to look toward the future with a shared commitment that arises out of the conviction that the condition of today's workplace is *not* acceptable. And that the progress we are making, while worthy of mention, is *not* good enough. Working together, we can do better. Working together, we will do better.



Michael Wood
Administrator
Oregon OSHA

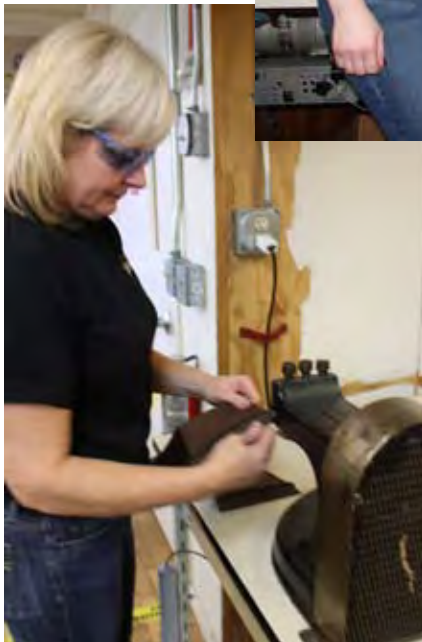


Real-life safety committees

Who they are, how they work

Oregon OSHA recently changed its rules regarding safety committees and safety meetings. Many employers have used safety meetings and committees as integral parts of their business for decades. Oregon OSHA's Resource is highlighting three safety committees setting an example.

(Left to right)
Carrie Wilson,
Lucy Shields, and
Tracy Dupuis are
part of West Coast
Shoe Company's
safety committee.



Tracy Dupuis works with a leather machine.

West Coast Shoe Company

After Carrie Wilson strained her shoulder from repetitively using a leather-sewing machine, she decided to join her company's safety committee. Wilson spent 141 days on light duty while the shoulder injury healed. Wilson works for West Coast Shoe Company, a 91-year-old family-owned-and-operated boot maker, based in Scappoose. With 35 employees, the company exceeds Oregon OSHA requirements by having an eight-member safety committee. Employee participation on the committee comes from all facets of the company.



The business has had a safety committee since the 1960s, but only in the past few years has it become a group making a big impact.

“We had to make the shift from ‘I’m going to get in trouble for saying something’ to ‘We’re going to get rewarded for saying something,’” said Wilson.



Inside the boot plant, workers face hazards such as cuts, spills (committee members recall past glue and oil spills), and repetitive-motion sprains and strains. In addition to monthly meetings, the safety committee does quarterly walk-thrus at the plant and put a couple members in charge of ergonomic concerns. Lucy Shields, a long-time employee and safety committee chairwoman, said there has been a shift in how effective the safety committee has become.



“Everything we ask for, as far as improvements, management has come through. You aren’t afraid to ask,” she said.

Adam Camberg, the plant’s foreman, also sits on the committee and said management is committed to safety and wants employees to feel comfortable about bringing up concerns.

Raw leather pieces are used to make boots at West Coast Shoe Company. Workers use eyelet setters as part of the process.

“If one person gets hurt, we are a small company and it impacts everybody,” said Camberg.

Kris Oman, another factory supervisor, said because the safety committee is out there making a difference, it’s been easy to attract volunteer members.

“Now we are all working together,” he said. “There is no hierarchy.”

“Everything we ask for, as far as improvements, management has come through. You aren’t afraid to ask.”

— Lucy Shields



Lucy Shields alternates between tasks to avoid repetitive strains.

Sandvik

At Sandvik, an Oregon City company that manufactures medical prosthetic devices such as hip and knee joints, the safety committee posts meeting minutes on a common bulletin board, per Oregon OSHA requirements.

"The culture here is we want to work safely and we encourage people to talk about it," said Doug Schmidt, a safety committee member.

Employees have helped implement a color-coded "Team Lift" system to minimize strains. They have also formed subcommittees to tackle reoccurring issues at the plant such as lockout/tagout, cranes and hoists, PPE, machine guarding and electrical, ergonomics, fire extinguishers, and more.



Members of Sandvik's safety committee do regular walk-throughs at the foundry to look for hazards.



Cindy Overstreet

"You have to have a management system that wants to get stuff done," he said. "That commitment, it's the top priority every day here."

Safety manager and committee member Cindy Overstreet said active participation from employees is really at the heart of their success.

"Our goal is safe production," she said, "The more eyes and ears that are picking up on safety, the better. It's all about awareness."

Another way the committee keeps its promise to keep Sandvik's 112 employees safe is through the "Caught Working Safely" program. Employees can fill out cards detailing what they saw when they caught someone working safely. The cards are dropped into a box and a random drawing nets a safe worker a prize, such as movie tickets or gift certificates.

Robert Jones, another safety committee member, said Sandvik's support enables the committee to be successful.

"Our goal is safe production. The more eyes and ears that are picking up on safety, the better. It's all about awareness."

— Cindy Overstreet



Steve Steiler (right), a safety committee member, talks with an employee in the quality control division.

TP Trucking

According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' National Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries report, trucking is considered the eighth most dangerous job in the country. It would seem a solid safety committee is essential but it's not always that simple when employees are on the move, days at a time.

"We try to include our drivers, who are everywhere but here," said Scott Kimmons, the maintenance manager at TP Trucking, a Central Point-based fleet.



(Left to right) Dave Arkenburg, David Hopkins Jr., and Scott Kimmons all take an active role on TP Trucking's safety committee.

Kimmons is part of TP Trucking's 10-member safety committee, which holds monthly meetings, trainings throughout the year, and programs to target specific objectives.

"We started a driver council and solicited six people that are drivers/owner-operators that go across the country," said Dave Arkenburg, the company's nationwide fleet manager. "They see the loading and delivery facilities on a daily basis and report back to us the potential work hazards."

TP Trucking's safety committee dates back to 1987, when Kimmons said it was created because it was an OSHA requirement.

"There wasn't a lot of company buy-in," Kimmons said of the old safety culture. "Since then, we got a new safety director and he got us involved in the Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program (SHARP). After that, it was a 180-degree turn around. We were wandering in the dark before. It was a matter of gradually building a culture."

He cautions any company hoping to make a change because it takes time.

"Anybody who is trying to develop a good safety culture, the incident rate almost always goes up before it goes down," he said. "People shouldn't be discouraged by that."

TP Trucking is also involved in a regional safety committee, which invites outsiders into their location to conduct a safety walk-thru. One or two members from TP Trucking's safety committee sign on for the year-long commitment to participate.

"The regional committee moves from facility to facility to have a clean set of eyes evaluate safety-related hazards and procedures," said Arkenburg. "There are things we all take for granted at every facility. Those fresh eyes find and make us back up and take note of potential hazards or procedure."

"The regional committee moves from facility to facility to have a clean set of eyes evaluate safety related hazards and procedures. There are things we all take for granted at every facility. Those fresh eyes find and make us back up and take note of potential hazards or procedure."

— Dave Arkenburg



Safety Committees for small construction businesses

By Ellis Brasch

Last year, Oregon OSHA revised its rule for workplace safety committees. That rule, **OAR 437-001-0765**, now allows employers with 10 or fewer employees to have safety meetings instead of traditional safety committees. That's good news for small business owners. And, if you have a construction business, you can hold safety meetings even if you have more than 10 employees – as long as at least half of them work at construction sites. Already have a safety committee? No problem, you don't have to change. But safety meetings will save time and keep your paperwork to a minimum.

Setting up and running a safety meeting is easy. Here's what you need to know and do to get started:

Who needs to attend safety meetings?

All your available employees must attend safety meetings. At least one person must have management authority to ensure that any hazards discussed are corrected. Safety meetings must be held on company time and your employees must receive their regular rate of pay during the meeting.

How often do we have to meet?

You must meet at least monthly and once before the start of any job that lasts more than one week.

What do we have to do at safety meetings?

The reason you have safety meetings is to keep your employees safe. So you must discuss any of your employees' safety or health concerns. Also, talk about any recent accidents, discuss why they happened, and how they could have been prevented.

Do we have to keep records?

You need to keep minutes for each meeting. All you need to write down is the meeting date, the name of everyone who attended, and a short description of what you talked about. For example, you could include discussions about recent accidents and hazards from tools, equipment, and unsafe practices.

Keep minutes of all safety meetings for three years. You can use the preprinted forms in Oregon OSHA's quick guide to safety committees and safety meetings, which is available online or from the Oregon OSHA Resource Center.

What if we don't have anything to talk about?

That shouldn't happen. Construction has always been one of the more hazardous industries in Oregon – falls, struck-by accidents, and overexertion (sprains and strains) are the leading causes. Could they happen at your site? Talk about how to prevent them.

Also, consider the most frequent construction-industry citations in Oregon (listed below). They don't change much from year to year. Are there any that apply to your site? What do you need to do to avoid a citation?

- Lack of appropriate fall protection
- Lack of written certification of fall protection training
- No fall protection on floors, balconies, or wall openings
- Portable ladders not three feet above surface
- No handrails on stairways with four or more risers
- Trenches not shored
- No training about safe operation of equipment
- No fall-protection training program
- Hard hats not worn
- Lack of fall protection on boom-supported work platforms
- No written hazard communication program
- Top of ladder used as a step
- Ladders used for the wrong purpose
- No safety meeting minutes
- Eye and face protection equipment not used when required
- Defective ladders not removed from service



Photo credit: Integrated Building Solutions of Oregon

Do I have to hold meetings at multi-employer sites?

If your employees attend the prime contractor's safety meetings you don't have to hold a separate safety meeting for your employees. But you must keep the minutes from the prime contractor's safety meetings for three years with your records. And you must still meet with your employees to discuss any accidents at the site that involve them.

Continued on page 10

Safety Committees for small construction businesses, continued**The difference between safety committees and safety meetings for construction businesses**

FAQ	Safety committees	Safety meetings
How often do we need to meet?	Meet at least monthly.	Meet at least monthly and meet once before the start of each job that lasts more than one week.
Who needs to attend meetings?	All safety committee representatives.	All available employees.
What records do we need to keep?	Keep a record of each meeting for three years.	Keep a record of each meeting for three years.
What do we need to do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have procedures for workplace safety and health inspections. • Work with management to establish accident investigation procedures to identify and correct hazards. • Establish a system for employees to report hazards to management and suggest how to correct hazards. • Establish a procedure for reviewing inspection reports and making recommendations to management. • Evaluate all accident and incident investigations and recommend how to prevent them from happening again. • Make safety committee meeting minutes available for all employees to review. • Evaluate how management holds employees accountable for working safely and recommend ways to strengthen accountability. 	<p>At each meeting, include discussions of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees' safety or health concerns. • Accident investigations, causes, and suggested corrective measures.

Ask Technical

Q:

Do “ear-bud” and MP3 player earphones qualify as PPE on worksites for hearing protection in the construction industry?

A:

No. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), “Items not specifically designed to serve as hearing protectors (e.g., cigarette filters, cotton, and .38-caliber shells) should not be used in place of hearing protectors.

Likewise, devices such as hearing aid ear-molds, swim molds, and personal stereo earphones (ear buds) are never considered hearing protection.”

In Oregon, construction industry employers are required to comply with the General Industry standard for **Occupational Noise Exposure**. The employer must administer a continuing, effective hearing conservation program whenever employee noise exposures equal or exceed an eight-hour time-weighted average sound level (TWA).

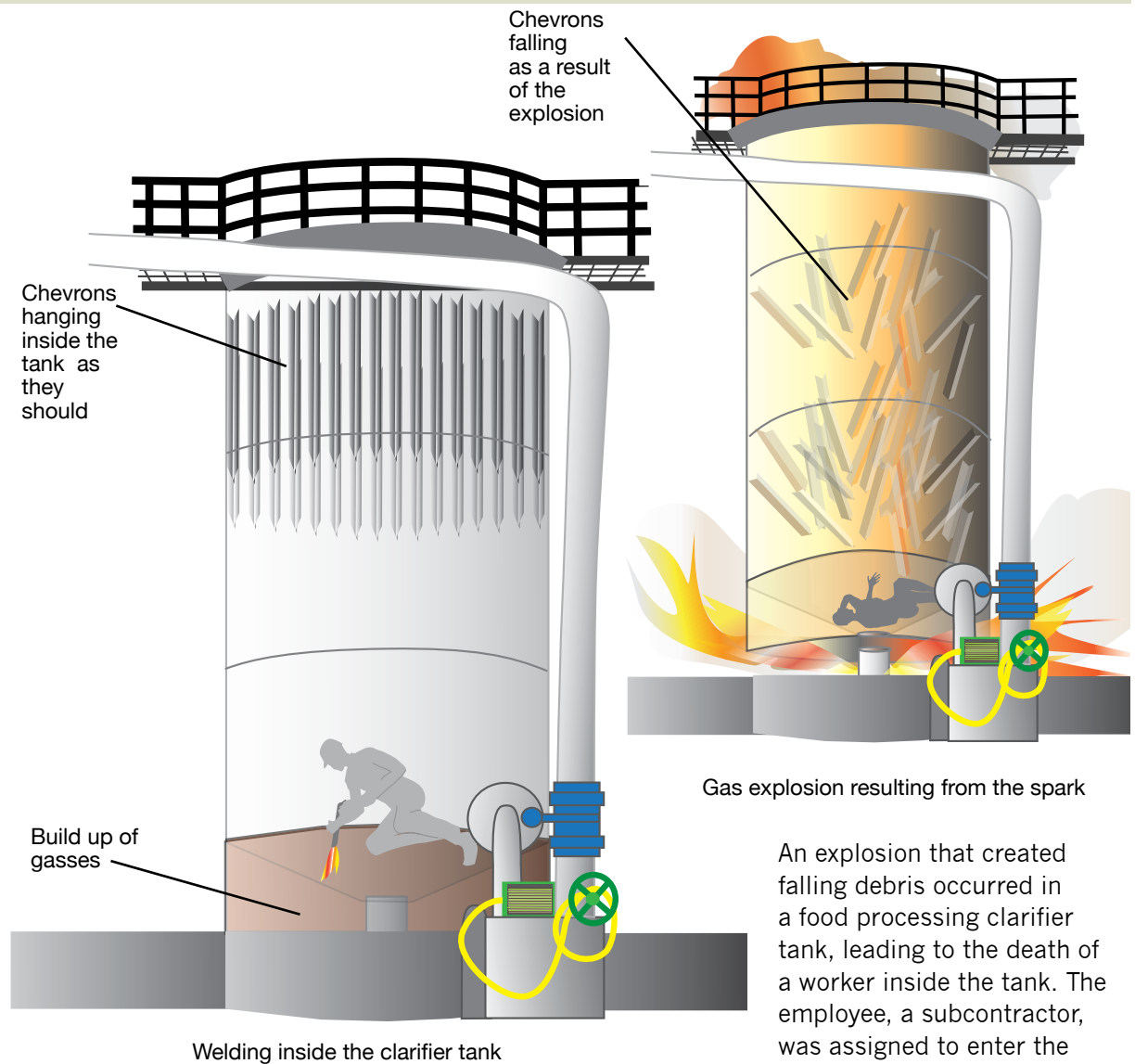
Employers must make hearing protectors available to all employees exposed to an eight-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels or greater at no cost to the employees. When eliminating the hazard is not feasible, personal hearing protection must attenuate employee exposure to an eight-hour time-weighted average of 90 decibels.



Practical Safety

Do you have a useful safety tip you would like to share?
Submit your creative or interesting tip to Resource editor
Melanie Mesaros at Melanie.I.Mesaros@state.or.us,
and include “Practical Safety” in the subject line.

You may see your tip printed in the
next issue of Resource!



Welding inside the clarifier tank

Gas explosion resulting from the spark

An explosion that created falling debris occurred in a food processing clarifier tank, leading to the death of a worker inside the tank. The employee, a subcontractor, was assigned to enter the tank and weld a crack in the

bottom. Employees of the host employer at the site prepped the tank and one acted as a confined space entry attendant, conducting air monitoring prior to and at the time of the explosion.

Chevrons were used inside the tank to remove dirt from wastewater that was used for cleaning potatoes. The wastewater was then recycled into the cleaning process. As host employees prepped the tank, they noticed some of the chevrons were not properly secured at the top of the tank. Although the hazard was reported to the host employer, the concern was not communicated to the subcontractor. The host employer also permitted its own employees' subsequent entries into the tank without adhering to the regulations of the Permit Required Confined Space Entry code.

The host employer's policy was to ensure that confined spaces were free from hazards before contractors were allowed entry to them. On the day of the accident, the host employee conducting air monitoring was getting troubling readings from a four-way gas meter. Not understanding the



Chevrons after the explosion.



Clarifier tank after the explosion.

significance of those readings, the employee discarded the results with the assumption the meter was not operating properly. Because employees were not trained on fully understanding the gas meter readings, the company permitted the victim to enter the tank.

Once inside, the welder's spark, combined with gases trapped in a void beneath the tank, set off an explosion that lifted the tank upwards. Loose chevrons and other debris impaled and buried the worker inside the tank. Improper confined space programs, a lack of pre-planning and failure to recognize hazards led to the accident.

Applicable standards:

1910.146(c)(7)(iv)

The employer did not re-evaluate the nonpermit space and determine whether it must be reclassified as a permit space in accordance with other applicable provisions of 1910.146(c)(7).

1910.146(c)(3)

When the employer decided its employees would not enter permit spaces, the employer did not take effective measures to prevent its employees from entering the permit spaces.

1910.146(c)(8)(ii)

When an employer arranged to have employees of another employer (contractor) perform work that involved permit space entry, the host employer did not apprise the contractor of the elements, including the hazards identified and the host employer's experience with the space, that made the space in question a permit space.

1910.146(e)(2)

Before the entry began, the entry supervisor identified on the permit did not sign the entry permit to authorize entry.

1910.146(j)(4)

The employer did not ensure that each entry supervisor verified that rescue services were available and that the means for summoning them were operable.

1910.146(d)(9)

Under the permit-required confined space program required by 1910.146(c)(4), the employer did not develop and implement procedures for summoning rescue and emergency services, for rescuing entrants from permit spaces, for providing necessary emergency services to rescued employees, and for preventing unauthorized personnel from attempting a rescue.

1910.146(k)(3)(i)

Each authorized entrant did not use a chest or full-body harness, with a retrieval line attached at the center of the entrant's back near shoulder level, or above the entrant's head.

1910.146(d)(1)

Under the permit-required confined space program required by 1910.146(c)(4), the employer did not implement the measure necessary to prevent unauthorized entry.

1910.146(f)(7)

The permit entry that documented compliance and authorized entry to a permit space did not identify the hazards of the permit space to be entered.

1910.146(f)(11)

The entry permit that documented compliance and authorized entry to a permit space did not identify the rescue and emergency services summoned and the means for summoning those services.

Continued on page 14

Oregon OSHA

Safety Notes:

Applicable standards, *continued*

1910.146(f)(12)

The entry permit that documented compliance and authorized entry to a permit space did not identify the communication procedures used by authorized entrants and attendants to maintain contact during entry.

1910.146(f)(13)

The entry permit that documented compliance and authorized entry to a permit space did not identify equipment, such as personal protective equipment, testing equipment, communications equipment, alarm systems, and rescue equipment to be provided.

1910.146(g)(1)

The employer did not provide training so that all employees whose work was regulated by 1910.146 (permit required confined spaces), acquired the understanding, knowledge, and skills necessary for the safe performance of the duties assigned.

437-001-0760(1)(e)(A)

Supervisors or persons in charge of work did not at all times ensure the execution in a safe manner of the work under their supervision.

1910.252(b)(4)(iv)

Where the welder must enter a confined space through a manhole or other small opening, means was not provided for quickly removing the welder in case of emergency.

437-002-0297(1)

Welding, torch or abrasive cutting, or other hot work was performed on drums, barrels, tanks, or other containers before they had been cleaned so thoroughly as to make absolutely certain that there were no flammable materials present or any substances such as greases, tars, acids, surface coatings, or other materials, which when subjected to heat, might produce flammable or toxic vapors.

1910.252(c)(4)(i)

All welding and cutting operations carried on in confined spaces were not adequately ventilated to prevent the accumulation of toxic materials or possible oxygen deficiency.

437-002-0285

Before welding or cutting has begun on walls, floors, or ceilings, an inspection was not made to see that no combustible material was present on the hidden side.

19th Annual 2009 Southern Oregon Occupational Safety & Health Conference



Keynote:
Big Trouble
by Chad Hymas

*Celebrating Innovation
in Safety & Health*

*Exhibits open
Wednesday
and Thursday*

OCTOBER 21 & 22, 2009

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Professional development workshop on October 20

Registration information: orosha.org/conferences

News Briefs

Become a fan of Oregon OSHA Conferences on Facebook

Oregon OSHA Conferences now has a fan site on Facebook. The page includes links to upcoming conferences, speakers, and photos. The goal is to provide fans with exclusive content, such as previews of presentations, access to speakers, and a forum for conference discussion.



Help us get to 100 fans. If you have a Facebook account, join our fan page!

Students invited to enter safety video contest

Save a friend. Work safe.

Cue the director; it's time for high school students across Oregon to create a 45-second public service announcement promoting young worker safety and health. The top three entries will take home cash prizes ranging from \$300 to \$500 and will earn a matching amount for their school.

The Oregon Young Worker Health and Safety Coalition, Oregon OSHA, SAIF Corporation, American Society of Safety Engineers, and DHS-Public Health Division, Occupational Public Health Program are sponsoring the contest.

The contest is designed to increase awareness about safety on the job for young people, with the theme of "Save a Friend. Work Safe." Specific video guidelines are outlined in the contest rules. Students are encouraged to develop a slogan, use humor, and get creative while emphasizing ways to protect themselves at work. Submissions will be judged on a specific set of criteria.

Bilingual or multilingual PSAs are welcomed, especially in languages commonly spoken in Oregon (such as Spanish and Russian).

The deadline for submissions is **Feb. 15, 2010**.

Contest winners will be unveiled at a screening event to be announced this spring and winning entries will be posted on YouTube. For detailed contest information including contest tips, rules, and entry forms, go to www.orosha.org/psacontest/.



News Briefs, continued

Flu guidelines developed for employers

With the continued spread of the H1N1 flu virus (swine flu) in Oregon, employers will play a key role in protecting employees' health and safety. Oregon OSHA has partnered with the Oregon Public Health Division to develop guidelines for reducing the risk of the flu in the workplace.

One of the key aspects of the guidelines is prevention. When employees are working directly with the public, they should have immediate access to alcohol-based surface wipes or paper towels and disinfectant cleaners, hand sanitizers, and an ample supply of tissue. Also, employees should not return to work if they are ill and should seek medical attention if symptoms are severe or they have pre-existing medical conditions.

You can find the complete guidance at <http://www.orosha.org/subjects/pandemic.html>.



Oregon OSHA adopts scheduling changes

Oregon OSHA is adopting a new fixed site enforcement scheduling rule, which eliminates the previous rule's reliance on whether a disabling claim has occurred at the worksite as the trigger for a worksite's presence on the list. It also shifts the focus away from employer-specific and location-specific claims data to industry-based risk.

Oregon OSHA has found such data is not sufficiently reliable from a statistical standpoint as an indicator for the vast majority of worksites in the state. The rule identifies places

of employment based on industry, and then bases the likelihood of inspection largely, but not entirely, on the nature of the industry's risk of injury, illness, or death. Within specific industries, locations will be randomly selected for inspections.

The rule will make relatively low-hazard industries, such as restaurants, less likely to appear on the scheduled list, while higher hazard industries, such as foundries, will see more inspections.





Workplace symposium focuses on safety and health challenges in year 2020

An aging population, new and unknown hazards, and growing multicultural differences were some of the major themes and challenges identified at the “Workplace Health & Safety: Looking Forward to 2020” symposium, held in Portland on Sept. 24, 2009.

John Howard, the newly appointed director of National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), was the keynote speaker at the event. He talked about how employers will need to connect with and train the country’s growing immigrant population, many of whom are young students today, legally born in the U.S.

“You have to figure out a way to transcend that culture,” he said. “Many will want to retain their native language. ... That is a reality that will affect how we approach safety and health.”

Howard also discussed what he calls an “underground economy,” which includes day laborers, contract workers, and the growing number of self-employed. He said the nontraditional status of these workers presents interesting questions about their protections.



NIOSH Director John Howard discussed challenges that workers will face in year 2020.

“Look at eBay,” Howard said. “You have independent sellers, who are not employees or contractors. EBay doesn’t pay them. In fact, they pay eBay.”

Exposure to unidentified, new technologies is another major concern for Howard.

“We have shirts that don’t require ironing and tennis balls that don’t lose their bounce,” he said, regarding the unknown nanoparticles that are used in the manufacturing process and whose hazards are not fully understood. “We need to figure out a way to protect these workers now.”

Pushing for the development of new structures to tackle these issues, Howard said, “I think if we are going to be in a better place in 2020, we have to do a lot of things.”

News Briefs, continued



Congratulations to these new SHARP companies:

- Fred Shearer & Sons Inc., Beaverton
- Cintas Document Management LLC, Portland
- Lumber Products Inc. - Medford Branch, Medford



19th annual

Western Pulp & Paper Workers Safety & Health Conference

December 1-4, 2009

Red Lion Hotel on the River – Jantzen Beach • Portland, Oregon

*Featuring Keynote Speaker – Joe Estey
Everyday Heroes — Extraordinary Results*

New this year:

Roundtable topics

- Hazard Awareness
- Lockout/Tagout
- Employee Involvement
- Contractor Safety
- Maintenance Work
- Near-Miss Reporting
- Confined Space
- Ergonomics

Friday General Session:

Brian's Story
by Jeff Bell

***Registration information
available now!***

Exhibits — Open Tuesday and Wednesday

If you have questions

or would like to receive registration materials contact the Conference Section,
503-378-3272 or toll-free in Oregon at 888-292-5247, option 1

orosh.org/conferences

Partners in Safety and Health — Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Going the distance

Meet a leading Oregon health and safety professional



Tara O'Keeffe started the business when she noticed her father, a cattle rancher, couldn't get relief for his cracked and worn hands.

What is your background and safety philosophy?

I am a pharmacist and have worked in many hospitals. I have seen (and treated) the consequences of poor safety practices. A safe workplace is the absolute No. 1 priority at O'Keeffe's. Without healthy and safe workers, there would be no way to sustain business.

Company: O'Keeffe's Working Hands, Sisters

Health and Safety Professional: Tara O'Keeffe, president and founder

Workforce: 20 employees

Common Hazards: Heavy machinery, ergonomics, heated containers, splashing liquids



O'Keeffe helps her staff check the lids on new product.

Do you have examples of any current projects with unique safety challenges?

As our business continues to expand, we have been faced with the challenge of maximizing our warehouse space. This has meant reconfiguring how our pallets of inventory are staged. Rather than adopting a “stack ‘em high and hope for the best” strategy, we have systematically approached the issue from a safety-first standpoint. The first thing we did was purchase a refurbished pallet stacker. To be honest, I was not exactly seeking ways to go out and spend money on machinery. However, if we are going to talk about safety being a priority, sometimes, as a business owner, you have to put your money where your mouth is. We designated and trained a few employees as operators and created new safety policies regarding the operation of the pallet stacker. The entire warehouse has become more efficient as a result of our efforts. Accessibility to the inventory has also improved. As an added benefit, the reconfiguration process provided more opportunities to reinforce and recognize good safety practices.



An employee checks containers being filled as they move along the conveyor machinery.



Hot, splashing liquids can be a hazard in the factory.



Melody Luloff (left) and Sheila Reifschneider ease ergonomic concerns by lifting the full tray together.



Peggy Chesser adds wax to the cream mixture.



Susan Fullhart makes sure each jar is filled on the line.

The tight economy has forced your company to downsize. How have you been able to maintain a safe workplace?

Communication is the key. We hold weekly safety meetings in a very open environment. Employees are encouraged to be frank while discussing potentially unsafe practices and situations. These roundtable discussions often result in safer and more efficient work practices. We realize that although our safety record is excellent, there is always room for improvement. O'Keeffe's has and always will welcome employee feedback. Because it is not feasible for the entire staff to attend every safety meeting, we have a rotating minute taker that writes up a summary after each safety meeting and distributes the minutes to those employees who were not in attendance at the meeting.

What advice do you have for other safety managers hoping to make a difference?

I would stress the idea that safety in the workplace is not optional. It is part of every employee's responsibility and job description. Most accidents are a result of taking the path of least resistance. Share with your team that a strong record of safety speaks well of an individual's commitment to excellence as an employee. Reward your team when previously defined safety milestones or goals are reached

(O'Keeffe's employees have been previously treated to lunches and quarterly outings). Use every safety-related incident or near miss as an opportunity to educate and remind.

Probably my favorite reward is a red "Superman" cape we periodically present to an employee that has done something exceptional in the area of safety. Lately, the cape winner has been someone that comes up with an idea to improve upon an existing safety practice. For obvious safety concerns, the employee doesn't get to run around the production area all day wearing the cape. It is more the presentation of the cape that is always a lot of fun.



Tara O'Keeffe was recently honored as the 2009-2010 Small Business Administration "Business Person of the Year" for Oregon.