

Improving Worker Safety and Health among American Indians/Alaska Natives: A Partnership Workshop

Executive Summary

On August 17-18, 2015, in Aurora, Colorado, 32 representatives from Tribes, Tribal organizations, academia and state and federal government came together for a partnership workshop to improve worker safety and health among American Indians and Alaska Natives. NIOSH, in collaboration with the Mountain and Plains Education and Research Center (MAPERC) hosted the workshop at the University of Colorado, Anschutz Medical Campus. The objectives were threefold; 1) meet and network to discuss worker safety, health and wellness issues and solutions, 2) learn about tribal resources, funding, data sources and surveillance systems that can help to develop worker safety and health initiatives, and 3) identify opportunities to work together.

Over the day and a half workshop, thirteen presentations covered diverse occupational safety and health (OSH) topics, including agricultural workers, building OSH capacity, cardiovascular disease, hearing loss, public health in Indian Country, Tribal worker safety and health programs, and young workers. Of particular note was a presentation discussing the Yupik ancestral health care system in Alaska, a holistic approach to maintaining a healthy, balanced life. This presentation highlighted the importance of a traditional indigenous approach to healthcare which is important to consider when developing health and safety initiatives. Breakout sessions and a small group activity provided attendees an opportunity to further discuss health and safety topics among American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Attendees participated from fourteen states, primarily from the Western United States. Attendees included Tribal Occupational Safety & Health professionals, Tribal epidemiologists, state Health Department representatives and physicians. Two well developed Tribal OSHA departments, from the Navajo Nation and Shoshone-Bannock Tribe, participated and presented at the workshop.

Evaluations were collected at the end of the workshop. Overall, both the workshop and the presentations were evaluated as “Very Good” by attendees. The discussions and networking opportunities stood out to many attendees as very useful, and the small group activity rated “Very High”. Many attendees indicated that as a result of the workshop, they plan to connect or collaborate with colleagues to advance worker safety and health in their community. Over 94% of attendees indicated they would attend another workshop.

Moving forward, priorities identified

Discussion focused on priority OSH issues and how to best address these issues. One specific suggestion was to develop a resource guide on how to establish a Tribal Occupational Safety and Health program with a list of staffing recommendations, credentials, and programming. “Continuing the conversation” was identified as important by attendees. Suggestions included quarterly calls, webinars, creation of an email listserv, establishing a Tribal Occupational Safety & Health group, and utilizing the planned NIOSH visits to develop a resource guide. Coordinating with the 12 Tribal Epidemiology Centers was a recurring suggestion. Funding was repeatedly

identified as important, as well as education and outreach and the need to highlight the importance of OSH to Tribal leadership. Surveillance measures were discussed as a way to measure OSH risk factors and evaluate OSH trends over time. To further build OSH capacity, additional surveillance capacity was noted as important.

Five site visits to tribes will occur in 2015-2016 to aid in the development of partnerships. The goals for these site visits is to 1) increase understanding of worker safety and health priorities, 2) develop a Tribal specific tool to assess worker safety and health, 3) gather information to include in a resource guide for Tribes. Through the workshop, NIOSH was able to elicit participation and will work with partners to plan these visits. The Navajo Nation visit is complete, and for the remaining four a tentative schedule has been developed. Tribes will be contacted soon to finalize arrangements.

- August 2015: Navajo Nation Occupational Safety and Healthy
- Fall 2015: Oklahoma City Area
- Fall 2015: Portland Area
- Winter 2015/2016: Albuquerque Area
- Spring 2016: Alaska Area