

California's Worker Occupational Safety and Health Training and Education Program

A Model For Other States

Introduction

California's Worker Occupational Safety and Health Training and Education Program (WOSHTEP), administered by the Commission on Health and Safety and Workers' Compensation (CHSWC), was created in 2002 by legislative mandate under California Labor Code Section 6354.7.

Program Purpose

WOSHTEP's purpose is to promote awareness of the need for safety and health prevention programs. The program focuses on developing and providing injury and illness prevention skills for employees and their representatives who take a leadership role in promoting safety and health in the workplace. CHSWC administers the program with two full-time staff.

Funding

Funding provided by workers' compensation insurance carrier fees (.0286 percent of paid indemnity claims or \$100, whichever is greater) under this section has given CHSWC the opportunity to train workers in safety and health with an innovative curriculum and experienced trainers. The amount of funding received annually is approximately \$1 million.

Program Design

CHSWC began designing WOSHTEP by surveying state, national, and international safety and health training programs and resources to see what was currently available. This information is posted on the CHSWC Web site.¹

CHSWC set up a project team consisting of in-house staff and trainers and curriculum developers from the Labor Occupational Safety and Health (LOSH) Program at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP) at the University of California, Berkeley. LOSH and LOHP also operate health and safety resource libraries and a distribution system of occupational safety and health training materials for WOSHTEP. The creation of a statewide resource library, mandated by the legislation, allows for a wider distribution of information.

CHSWC next established a labor-management advisory board to assist the project team in developing WOSHTEP curricula, teaching methods, and specific course material about occupational safety and health. The advisory board also assists in providing links to the target audience and broadening partnerships with worker-based organizations, labor studies programs, and others that are able to reach the target

¹ See: <http://www.dir.ca.gov/CHSWC/TrainingProgramsResources/Surveycover.html>

audience. The advisory board prepares an annual report evaluating the use and impact of WOSHTEP. The 2004 Annual Report can be found on CHSWC's Web site.²

Key stakeholders, including employers, labor reps, educators, insurers, governmental agencies, and community-based organizations, play an important role in determining the success of WOSHTEP. The project team conducted needs assessment activities with over 100 representatives from key constituency groups. These needs assessments were designed to provide direction in efforts to develop core and supplemental curricula and implement pilot training programs statewide.

Based on needs assessment results, best practices identified by the initial survey, and discussions with the WOSHTEP Advisory Board, two immediate needs were identified: 1) a curriculum to address competencies for effective participation in workplace injury and illness prevention programs and 2) multilingual safety and health resources.

To address these needs, a participatory curriculum and a multilingual resource list, prepared by LOHP, was developed. The multilingual resource list is found on CHSWC's Web site and is updated regularly. Training handouts are available in Spanish and Chinese. In future years, other languages will be added as needed and as funding allows.

The legislation mandates that training be created and made available to employees who work in industries on the high hazard list and industries or trades where workers are experiencing numerous or significant injuries or illnesses. Training also focuses on occupational groups with special needs, such as those who do not speak English as their first language, workers with limited literacy, young workers, and other traditionally underserved industries or groups of workers.

² See: <http://www.dir.ca.gov/CHSWC/chswc.html>

WOSHTEP Curriculum

The WOSHTEP curriculum is intended to help participants develop the skills needed to participate actively in injury and illness prevention efforts, multiply resources, and join in problem-solving in the workplace. The training addresses hazards that result in significant worker injuries, illnesses, or compensation costs.

The project team selects participants by referrals from the advisory board, insurance carriers, worker advocacy groups, and other interested parties. Participants who successfully complete the six-module core training, plus a minimum of three supplemental modules relevant to their workplace, are recognized as Worker Occupational Safety and Health (WOSH) Specialists and receive a certificate of completion.

Possible roles WOSH Specialists can play upon completion of training:

- Participate on an employer-employee health and safety committee.
- Help to identify a range of potential hazards on the job by conducting surveys of workers or walk-through inspections to determine safety and health problems.
- Assist in analyzing data collected from surveys, inspections, and other sources in order to identify and prioritize safety and health problems to solve.
- Participate in efforts to reduce or eliminate common hazards.
- Contribute to efforts to explain the legal requirements for maintaining a safe and healthful workplace and support an employer's compliance efforts.
- Help to provide health and safety training to co-workers.
- Serve as a health and safety resource for co-workers, employers, unions, and labor-management committees.

The core curriculum consists of the following modules:

- *Promoting Effective Safety Programs: An Introduction to WOSHTEP*
This module describes the program, roles, and responsibilities of the WOSH Specialist, the impact of injuries and illnesses on the job, the benefits of prevention efforts, and the elements of an effective injury and illness prevention program.
- *Identifying Hazards in the Workplace*
After completing this module, WOSH Specialists are able to identify a range of workplace hazards, methods for gathering information about job hazards, and resources to assist them in investigating safety and health problems.
- *Controlling Hazards in the Workplace*
Participants learn how to prioritize safety and health hazards in their own workplaces and how to identify specific methods to control those hazards.
- *Health and Safety Rights and Responsibilities*
This module describes key regulations and standards that govern workplace safety and health, as well as employee and employer rights, responsibilities, and protections under Cal-OSHA and the California Labor Code.
- *Workers' Compensation and Return-to-Work Programs*
This module identifies injury prevention efforts, useful workers' compensation information for injured workers, and ways to promote successful return-to-work.
- *Resources and Strategies for Taking Action*
Participants develop effective safety and health recommendations and state specifically how they will apply their new skills as WOSH Specialists upon return to their workplaces.

Six supplemental modules have been developed and cover the following topics:

- *Biohazards*
- *Chemical Hazards and Hazard Communication*
- *Communicating Effectively About Workplace Health and Safety*

- *How Adults Learn Best*
- *Introduction to Ergonomics*
- *Joint Labor-Management Health and Safety Committees*

Additional supplemental modules will be developed as the need arises.

Program Results

Training has been conducted with employees from a variety of industries and occupations. In northern California, home care workers completed the WOSH Specialist training in English with simultaneous translation in Chinese and Spanish for monolingual participants. An “open enrollment” model, which means bringing together a diverse group of employees with different employers, occupations, and industries, was also taught. By sharing their varied experiences and identifying similar issues, participants enriched this particular WOSH Specialist course.

The curriculum was also offered in a community college setting at Laney College in Oakland, California, during the Fall 2004 semester. In southern California, the WOSH Specialist curriculum was taught in Spanish for a health and safety committee of a light manufacturer in East Los Angeles. In addition, worker advocates of a coalition that provides training and employment for the homeless, another small manufacturer, and a union local, have all received WOSHTEP training.

CHSWC maintains a database of all WOSH Specialists, trainers, course information, and certificates awarded. Recently graduated WOSH Specialists have reported many positive changes from completing this coursework. They have stated that they are better able to identify the causes of injuries, identify and reduce hazards, and provide leadership in safety and health promotion in the workplace. WOSH Specialists are invited to attend a refresher course each year for an update on new safety and health issues and to share their field experiences.

Other Outreach Activities

The Labor Occupational Health Program is currently developing a training-of-trainers (TOT) course to establish a statewide network of trainers, as mandated by the statute. These trainers will complete the TOT course to learn effective training skills and become familiar with teaching the modules. They will complete an apprenticeship that will include teaching a minimum of two classes with a master trainer from the project team.

Outreach is being conducted to identify trainers interested in teaching the WOSHTEP curriculum. Expansion of the trainer network will include mentoring and co-training new trainers and partnering with community colleges and other organizations. Ways are being explored to build a network among trainers to encourage and facilitate the exchange of information.

Additional outreach is underway with employers through a series of awareness trainings to promote employer interest and participation in WOSHTEP. Additionally, the Labor Occupational Safety and Health Program's Youth Peer Educators are conducting prevention-awareness outreach sessions to limited English-speaking and/or immigrant workers. These workers are encouraged to share what they have learned with their employers in order to promote the full 24-hour WOSHTEP course to a group of workers onsite. The project team works with the WOSHTEP Advisory Board, TOT participants, needs assessment stakeholders, and others to prioritize employer groups who would most benefit from awareness trainings.

CHSWC also identified the need for development of materials for very small businesses that are not in a financial position to send their employees to a 24-hour course. To address this need, LOHP, in conjunction with the California Restaurant Association, the State Compensation Insurance Fund, and Cal-OSHA Consultation, developed a small business alternative training model. LOHP designed and imple-

mented a one-hour TOT curriculum for employers who will, in turn, train their employees on key safety and health topics.

The small business training model is industry-specific and organized as two short modules consisting of 30 minutes on identifying hazards and 30 minutes on controlling hazards. It is currently being offered to restaurant owners and managers. Participants are given tip sheets, suggested policies, and hazard checklists for restaurants. This training has been well received. Participants report that the training materials are easily used with staff to teach about safety and health in their restaurant. They also note an increase in employee respect for safety and health in the workplace. Materials developed for this program can be customized for other industries.

CHSWC welcomes the opportunity to share lessons it has learned in developing WOSHTEP with other IAIABC members who are interested in promoting safety and health efforts in their home states.

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