

AIHA Top Public Policy Occupational and Environmental Health and Safety Issues

Biannual public policy survey indicates issues that are most likely to present concerns for the industrial hygiene profession in 2005–2006

The American Industrial Hygiene Association, as a result of its biannual membership survey, projects the top public policy issues of concern to AIHA members and the occupational and environmental health and safety profession over the next two years.

AIHA has identified the following as the top public policy issues for 2005-2006:

Regulatory Issues

Permissible Exposure Limits

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration PELs are consensus-based limits that indicate how long an individual can be exposed to a particular substance without experiencing harmful effects. The occupational health and safety profession considers PELs to be one of the most basic tools needed to protect workers. However, many PELs have not been updated since the 1970s. Science in this area has matured, but the PELs have not. AIHA continues to facilitate a working group of industry and labor professionals striving to reach a consensus on the best way to update the PELs. The group continues to consider ways that regulatory or legislative changes could improve current methods.

Emergency Preparedness and Response

Homeland security is as vast as the transportation system and is as personal as the individual workers who need protection. OEHS professionals are crucial to the safety of emergency response workers and the community that depends on them. AIHA began its efforts on this issue following the Sept. 11 attacks and continues to move forward to provide assistance regarding emergency response issues. In addition to internal association efforts to build programs to supplement federal homeland security efforts, AIHA hopes to work with other organizations to develop programs that address the important issues in emergency preparedness and response.

Safety and Health Programs

Notwithstanding the fact that this issue has been removed from the OSHA regulatory agenda, AIHA fully supports efforts to ensure that employers incorporate a written safety and health program into workplace policies.

Ergonomics

AIHA remains convinced of the need for an ergonomics standard, yet in the absence of a standard supports OSHA's development and release of voluntary industry-specific guidelines. In addition to the considerable information available on AIHA's website, the AIHA/OSHA alliance focuses most of its efforts on ergonomics issues.

Hazard Communication/Material Safety Data Sheets

Because of increased interest in hazardous materials over the past several years, AIHA and its members have had success in also bringing hazard communication and MSDSs to the forefront. AIHA supports efforts to improve the accuracy of MSDSs and supports efforts to improve hazard communication for employers and employees. Such efforts are also a crucial element in protecting workers and others in case of national emergencies.

Legislative Issues

OSHA, NIOSH, EPA Appropriations

Protection of workers and research and education efforts in support of worker health and safety are not possible without adequate federal resources dedicated to the issue. While OSHA and NIOSH have fared reasonably well over the past several years, continued concern over the federal budget deficit could create the need to reduce expenditures in this area. AIHA believes that OSHA and NIOSH must remain adequately funded to carry out their statutory responsibility to ensure that every worker who goes to work returns home safe and healthy. AIHA also supports adequate funding for the Environmental Protection Agency.

Emergency Preparedness and Response

Similar to AIHA's concern for this issue from a regulatory perspective, AIHA supports legislative measures that further incorporate programs for emergency preparedness and response. AIHA believes that both federal and state legislation is needed to clearly define the kind of programs needed and the resources to put these programs in place.

Professional Recognition/Title Protection

This issue continues to appear in the top public policy issues for AIHA, as it has since 1993. Professional recognition/title protection allows industrial hygienists and others who have met minimum educational and experience requirements (such as certified industrial hygienists and certified safety professionals) to be legally defined and recognized as competent to perform certain work without the need for additional requirements. While some form of professional recognition/title protection legislation has been enacted in 18 states, AIHA continues to educate federal and state policymakers about the importance of recognizing those professionals who have received education and certification from nationally recognized and accredited organizations.

Laboratory Accreditation

Accredited laboratories are the best way to ensure that test samples from workplaces, homes, and food facilities are analyzed correctly. Over the course of the last several years, AIHA has been working to see that the AIHA laboratory accreditation program is noted in federal and state legislation and regulation as one of the programs with national recognition and acceptance. This issue continues to be an important part of both scientific and government affairs around the country.

OSHA Reform—Compliance Assistance, Third Party Review, Professional Certification, Federal Contracting/OSHA Compliance, Voluntary Protection Program, Criminal Penalties

Congress is likely to consider several measures that would reform a number of OSHA policies. As was the case in the 108th Congress, AIHA will continue to make recommendations and monitor any potential changes at OSHA that may impact occupational health and safety and workers.

Material Safety Data Sheets

Over the course of the past year, there has been increased attention given to MSDSs and their importance in protecting workers from hazardous materials. Much of this increased attention is due to international acceptance of the Globally Harmonized System. AIHA supports efforts to improve the training provided to employers and employees in developing and interpreting MSDSs, improve the accuracy of MSDSs, and work with Congress and others to determine whether, and how, the United States should address the issue of the GHS.

Other issues AIHA members find most important are personal protective equipment, generic exposure assessment regulations, and risk assessment legislation. AIHA makes these issues a priority within its government affairs efforts and strives to keep occupational health and safety in the forefront with federal and state policymakers.