

Title of Paper

WOSHTEP: A MODEL FOR PREVENTION AND RETURN TO WORK THROUGH
WORKER LEADERSHIP

Presenter:

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Descriptive Abstract

This innovative state-wide initiative to reduce workplace injuries and illnesses focuses on educating worker leaders who then serve as a resource to labor and management.

Extended Abstract

This presentation will describe the innovative approach taken by the state of California to reducing workplace injuries and illnesses through a state-wide worker leadership program, called the Worker Occupational Safety and Health Training and Education Program (WOSHTEP). WOSHTEP was established in 2003 under the California Labor Code and is funded by an assessment on insurance carriers who are authorized to write workers' compensation insurance in the state. These funds are used each year to develop and implement WOSHTEP through interagency agreements with three university-based resource centers located at the Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP) at the University of California (UC), Berkeley, the Labor Occupational Safety and Health Program (LOSH) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and the Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (WCAHS) at the University of California, Davis.

WOSHTEP focuses on developing injury and illness prevention skills of employees and their representatives who can then take a leadership role in promoting health and safety in the workplace. Over the years, WOSHTEP has developed and implemented a number of activities aimed at preparing worker leaders to be able to identify workplace hazards, participate in solving safety problems, and serve as a resource to management and co-workers. These activities include a 3 day worker leadership training program, called the Worker Occupational Safety and Health (WOSH) Specialist course; easy-to-use health and safety materials for a variety of audiences; awareness classes targeting vulnerable

working populations; young worker leadership academies; and the three university-based resource centers reaching all areas of the state and across all industries and occupations.

Since implementation began in 2004, WOSHTEP has served over 3,000 workers and over 750 employers, providing close to 3,500 hours of instruction. To date, WOSHTEP has provided health and safety information and/or training to numerous industries including: construction; small manufacturers; state and local government; corrections and rehabilitation; health care; telecommunications; agriculture; transportation; and schools. Targeted efforts have also been launched to reach small business owners and managers in the janitorial, restaurant, and dairy industries. WOSHTEP activities are guided by a labor/management advisory committee.

This presentation will describe WOSHTEP activities in general and then provide a more specific summary of a major component of the program -- the WOSH Specialist course. This three-day course teaches worker leaders to be able to describe the importance and key elements of a successful injury and illness prevention program in the workplace; to identify a full range of potential hazards on the job and specify root causes of injuries and illnesses; to evaluate control measures for common hazards; to explain the legal requirements for maintaining a healthy and safe workplace in order to support employers' compliance efforts; to participate actively in injury and illness prevention efforts and problem-solving in the workplace; to serve as a health and safety resource for others, including co-workers, joint labor-management committees, unions and employers; and to contribute to the reduction of workers' compensation costs through preventive actions and early return-to-work efforts.

This presentation will also provide a summary of the results of a recent formal evaluation of the WOSH Specialist course. Finally, examples of actions being taken by WOSH Specialists back in their workplaces following attendance at the 3-day WOSH Specialist course will be offered.

Topic Track

Applied: Empirical or Institutional Studies