

Oregon's Workplace Health and Safety: Looking Forward to 2020

Lunch Workgroup # 1 - Workplace Safety and Health Transitions to Green

Discussion

Green jobs were defined as those that: 1) provide services or products to increase energy efficiency; 2) produce reusable energy; 3) prevent environmental degradation; 4) enhance environmental restoration; 5) promote sustainability policies; or 6) provide training and services in green technology.

The Workgroup's Task: to identify four leading workplace safety and health concerns or new strategies to meet demands in this area.

**An underlying theme throughout the following discussion was that occupational health and safety professionals need to push for representation in the decision- and policy-making process related to green products and practices.

A. Major areas of concern

1. Perception of "green" and its affect on Safety & Health

Green product safety: some are hazardous.

Example: hydrofluoric acid in consumer tire cleaning products

a. There is a need for Regulation and Oversight
EPA is trying to develop labeling standards that define green

b. Watchdog groups

Some consumer groups are trying to increase awareness of truth in advertising regarding green products

Green Jobs: are they safer?

a. We don't know much about the safety of some processes that are used
(e.g. nanomaterials)

b. Green behaviors may not always be safe
(e.g. reducing lighting to save energy, driving small hybrids)

1. training is an issue

2. new technologies may add hazards (e.g. high voltage systems in hybrid cars)

c. We are starting from the beginning with hazard identification, evaluation, training, and mitigation

1. OH & S professionals need to be first at the table to make the business case for policy development, etc

2. We need to pre-think things before they are implemented, otherwise unintended consequences may result.

Perceptions regarding safety of green products and technologies: many believe that “if it is green, then it is safe”.

- a. Principles of hazard and risk assessment are the same for green vs traditional chemicals and processes.
- b. There are some new technologies/materials that need to be evaluated for safety.

2. Do we understand current safety testing and labeling of green products?

- a. 4 types of green
 1. carbon footprint green
 2. energy or environmental sustainability green (e.g. ‘organic’)
 3. Occupational Health and Safety green
 4. Lifecycle green

Example: Walmart is conducting research on which products are green from all the above vantage points vis a vis “sustainability” (people, environment, economics, equity)

- b. There is a need to understand the business case over lifecycle case for the use of green products
 1. social responsibility vs economics

3. Data gaps

- a. variation between environmental and health effects
- b. lack of safety baselines
- c. potential for misinformation (fox and henhouse situation)
 1. who provides the data or proof of safety?
- d. may need to expand the regulations already in place or add effective green-specific regulations
- e. need effective methods for oversight
- f. harmonization/consistency/transparency between standards
 1. e.g. occup health standards.....there are many different ones

4. Problems and Strategies for transitioning the public into the use of green products

(defining/educating re green standards, public education, certification, efficacy)

Ongoing examples: introduction of CFL/LED lighting, defining ‘organic’ to the public.

- a. We need to develop a categorized list of “green” products
- b. Oregon-based approach – “the Oregon way” – what are our strengths?
 - Identify industries, jobs etc. that are unique to Oregon and which can derive benefit from going green
 - Can use area(s) of expertise within Oregon (Example: CROET is helping Metro to define and rank “greenness” of the compounds they use)
- c. We may have to start simple, for example, begin with cleaning products
- d. Policy side: OR is becoming a leader in policy development