

## Oregon Organizations Collaborate to Move the Needle Toward Total Worker Health

By Dede Montgomery, Liz Hill and Michael Wood

*In this article, three members of the Oregon Total Worker Health Alliance provide an update on the work of the alliance, including development of a total worker health training curriculum designed for OSH, workers' compensation, and human resources practitioners and professions. Learn more about the alliance at [www.ohsu.edu/oregon-institute-occupational-health-sciences/oregon-total-worker-health-alliance](http://www.ohsu.edu/oregon-institute-occupational-health-sciences/oregon-total-worker-health-alliance).*

**Oregon is sometimes praised for being** unusually collaborative in building consensus on various matters, particularly those related to workplace safety and health. OSH professionals, business, labor and regulators may not always agree with each other's views, but those in the discussion are often willing to consider other perspectives to better work together on matters related to workplace safety and health.

A recent outcome of this philosophy is Oregon's foray into the creation of the first statewide alliance in total worker health. The alliance forges an effective partnership between three state-based organizations:

- an academic research institute, Oregon Institute of Occupational Health Sciences at Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU), which includes the Oregon Healthy Workforce Center a NIOSH-funded Total Worker Health Center of Excellence;
- Oregon OSHA, the state OSHA;
- SAIF Corp., a not-for-profit, state-chartered workers' compensation insurance company.

The three partners have agreed that while each may not offer identical support or specific resources to stakeholders on the topic, the partners share the belief that total worker health is important to work organizations. We are united in our com-

mitment to help expand the knowledge and application of total worker health principles by leveraging the combined strength of these three state-based organizations.

Signing the alliance in February 2017 was an affirmation of ongoing and historical collaborations between all three parties over prior decades, whereby discussing total worker health produced a shared interest in forming such an alliance. All three partners have regularly collaborated on issues and initiatives that impact OSH and well-being in Oregon. With the formation of the alliance, we specifically target how we can work together to move the needle in Oregon to improve safety, health and well-being for all workers, using concepts, evidence and data related to total worker health principles. Our traditional views of OSH have been updated by: 1) identifying and defining workplace hazards in a way that allows expansion into nontraditionally recognized hazards related to work; 2) reimagining effective integration of traditionally siloed departments; and 3) recognizing how the organization of work impacts overall safety and health. This newer view flavors our explanation of the hierarchy of controls, and the need to integrate communication and development of organizational resources to address these needs. Identification of general aging in the workforce, increased chronic health conditions and an awareness of mental wellness all affect how we view and redefine our efforts to prevent injury and preserve health. We pay more attention to and acknowledge how psychosocial hazards and mental wellness contribute to injuries and illnesses, both on and off the job, and affect workers and their families and communities, and the organizations that employ them.

We don't expect to figure everything out or to move ahead on all possible fronts at once. Our earliest concrete collaborative initiative has been development and presentation of our total worker health curriculum, designed for OSH, workers compensation and human resources professionals. Implementing this curriculum seemed a necessary initial step as both SAIF Corp. and Occupational Health Sciences/Oregon Healthy Workforce Center have provided education and training on the concept of total worker health for some time, often at conferences organized



(Above) The total worker health classes help professionals identify total worker health solutions for their workplaces using evidence-based research, tools and case studies.

(Right) Representatives of the Oregon Total Worker Health Alliance organizations gather for signing of the Alliance agreement in February 2017.



OREGON TOTAL WORKER HEALTH ALLIANCE

by both Oregon OSHA and Oregon chapters of ASSP. It made sense to develop universal course expectations and objectives in line with the discussion at NIOSH and other total worker health partners, and to avoid redundancies or inconsistencies as we discuss these issues with our often mutual audiences. To date, we have developed a half-day Total Worker Health 101 course, which serves as a prerequisite to a number of planned additional courses or modules (and may become available online in the future). The course has been presented, along with a half-day Total Worker Health Workplace Solutions course, at three regional conferences (Western Pulp, Paper and Forest Products OSH Conference, 2019 Oregon Governor's Occupational Safety and Health Conference, and through the University of Washington's NIOSH-funded Engineering Resource Center's continuing education program). Fall 2019-20 classes will be offered to audiences representing Oregon SHARP Alliance, Washington Governor's Industrial Safety and Health Conference and the Region X Voluntary Protection Program Participants' Association Safety Summit. Additional modules are being created including one addressing total worker health and sleep for regional conferences, including those sponsored by Oregon OSHA.

Looking to the near future, we imagine prioritizing joint projects relating to workers' compensation improvements and projects that utilize state-based injury data. In addition to these tangible results, our alliance leaves us with the additional benefits of a formal format for tracking the evolving thinking about workplace safety, health and well-being, clearer objectives and methods for each organization, the ability to standardize and share resources from each member of the alliance within each other's tool kits, and easier avenues of action.

### What We Are Learning

Partners view total worker health from different perspectives. Each perspective is important and, as a group, these divergent perspectives provide a more inclusive opportunity to understand overall needs. The partners agree that total worker health is and will continue to be an evolution and work in progress. There is no one way to proceed in total worker health, and each industry and organization will best build on the current strengths of the organization. Participants are excited about the Total Worker Health 101 curriculum and look forward to new modules being developed. **PSJ**

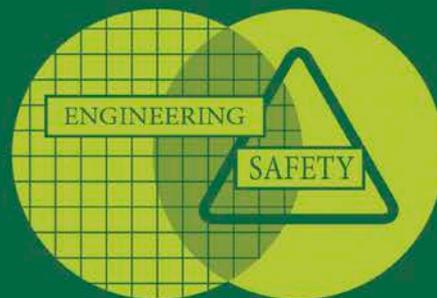
**Dede Montgomery M.S., CIH**, leads outreach and education for and provides industrial hygiene expertise to Oregon Institute of Occupational Health Sciences and Oregon Healthy Workforce Center. She holds an M.S. in Public Health/Environmental Health Sciences and a B.S. in Biology. She is Vice President of ASSP's Columbia-Willamette Chapter, and a member of the Society's Council on Professional Affairs and Total Worker Health Task Force. She is also a member of the Society's Women in Safety Excellence (WISE) Common Interest Group (CIG).

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