

## Collaboration between members from national societies on OHTA module translation

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For several years, some Occupational Hygiene Training Association (OHTA) modules have been translated from English into French but they were waiting for validation to be considered as final and made available to all on the OHLearning website. That is why several members from different French-speaking national societies (SOFHYT – France; SSHT – Switzerland; AUDA-NEPAD – African Union; CRBOH – Canada; and BSOH – Belgium; and aided by SAIOH – South Africa) are currently working together to ensure the availability of OHTA modules in French. This is a good example of collaboration



between national societies to develop occupational hygiene throughout the world. The aim is also to allow French-speaking countries to have access to such training modules to improve their occupational hygiene knowledge. If any of you speak French and would like to help us, please contact me at [presidence@sofhyt.fr](mailto:presidence@sofhyt.fr).

## Training developments for occupational hygienists in New Zealand

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A recent report from the Health and Safety Association of New Zealand (HASANZ) identified gaps in the workforce and highlighted the lack of occupational hygienists in New Zealand (NZ). The report states that there were 32 fully qualified occupational hygienists and 17 technicians in 2018. This is fewer than in many comparable countries. The report also stated that there are many challenges to develop accessible education, training and professional development pathways to meet current and future demands.

To address these challenges, WorkSafeNZ funded a project to help build the country's capability and capacity in occupational hygiene. As a part of this project, the New Zealand Occupational Hygiene Society (NZOHS) and HASANZ engaged with tertiary providers. This resulted in Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Australia, and Massey and Otago Universities in New Zealand working with NZOHS and HASANZ to find a solution.

The work involved was not straightforward and the staff at the universities, especially ECU, is to be commended as they worked through the complexities of three universities working together to achieve one common goal, viz. to have more occupational hygienists in NZ.

In October this year, after nearly two years, it was announced that the Master of Occupational Hygiene and Toxicology degree will be available to NZ students to support workplace development of the health and safety workforce in NZ. The degree is accredited by the Australian Institute of Occupational Hygiene (AIOH) and the British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS), which means that NZ can help contribute to supplying more occupational hygienists to fulfil the shortages in the domestic, and eventually global, markets.

In these days of COVID-19 restrictions on international travel,



this programme is mostly offered online, which allows our students to study at home. Workshops provide real-world experiences for students to develop practical skills needed in the assessment of workplace hazards that can harm human health. These activities could include monitoring hazards such as noise, radiation, dust, gases, and biological contaminants to which people are exposed every day. The workshops can also be delivered locally.

ECU associate professor, Sue Reed (director: Occupational and Environmental Health and Safety), who is also a certified occupational hygienist (COH)<sup>®</sup>, says "It is important that each country develops their own training programme for professional occupational hygienists. Many New Zealanders don't realise the role that occupational hygienists play in protecting both the workforce and the general community from adverse impacts on their health from chemical and biological hazards".

It has been good to see ECU, Massey University, Otago University, HASANZ and WorkSafeNZ all support NZ efforts to train our workforce. There is still work to be done in ensuring that a sustainable system exists into the future. This is being led by ECU working with Otago and Massey Universities to get their own accredited courses up and running. They are advocating to the NZ government for scholarships to assist NZ students to achieve their goals of becoming occupational hygienists.

# First ever Swiss Society of Occupational Hygiene professional development course

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The Swiss Society of Occupational Hygiene (SSOH) is proud to share that it successfully conducted its first ever professional development course (PDC) this year! The course, 'How to define an exposure measurements strategy and interpret the data via the use of statistical tools', was held on 18 September 2020 and instructed by Prof. Jérôme Lavoué from the University of Montreal. The course was originally planned to be held in-person in April 2020 but was rescheduled due to COVID-19 restrictions. It was held over Zoom with approximately 40 participants and was open to members and



**Figure 1. Poll question from the opening of the course**



non-members. It was interactive, with poll questions asking participants to use their judgement regarding exposure data, and exercises using the platform, Expostats ([www.expostats.ca](http://www.expostats.ca)) – a widely used tool to statistically analyse occupational exposure data, developed by Prof. Lavoué and colleagues. Responses to the poll are shown in Figure 1. The SSOH would like to extend a big thank you to all of the participants!

The SSOH would also like to acknowledge the planning committee for its work: Dr Ludovic Vieille-Petit (co-president), Samantha Connell (Board member), Burim Thaçi (member), Sébastien Linder (member) and Deyan Poffet (member). The committee is open to exchange with other societies on future PDCs and their experiences. Stay tuned – SSOH plans to hold two events in 2021!

# Changes proposed by Europe to the management of cancer-causing substances

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The British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS) has been asked to respond to changes to the employee protections that have been proposed by the European Union. This has prompted further discussions with the BOHS head office and the board, regarding the legal ramifications of Brexit on occupational exposure limits (OELs) for carcinogens and mutagens.

Additional protections against cancer-causing agents, which will not automatically benefit British workers after January 2021, have been proposed by the European Commission. It has recommended additional limits to exposure of workers to benzene, nickel and acrylonitrile. According to the European Commission, this would affect people working in industries as diverse as car maintenance, electronics manufacture, and the fur and leather industry. According to the Commission, these substances cause a range of cancers, including breast, brain and stomach cancers, leukaemia, and miscarriage. They have proposed an amendment to the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive requiring the distribution of recommendations for risk reduction through appropriate risk management measures, including reducing the OELs which set the levels beyond which employers should be criminally liable.



The BOHS is expressing concerns that, after Brexit, UK guidance on these substances might not be informed by the latest research about cancer risks in humans. Published government guidance on acrylonitrile, for example, references the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), saying that acrylonitrile is only a possible human carcinogen. However, last year IARC's own expert committee stated that there is now evidence that it probably does cause cancer in men and women, and has recommended that the IARC formally raise its risk level. Nonetheless, this could take IARC several years. The European Commission has raised the risk levels already, using an expedited methodology for scientific review.

While some members of the BOHS have raised concerns about the new role of the Risk Assessment Committee in speedily setting OELs, the BOHS is using its membership of the newly formed European Platform on Occupational Hygiene (a consortium of

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health prevention professional bodies) to welcome the new research and legal limits for workers in Europe. It also joins IARC and fellow European Platform members in calling for Europe to do further work on the cancer-causing properties of metal-cutting fluids. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is yet to say whether the new OELs will be followed in the UK.

Brexit has placed the UK in a confused legal position with regard to pending and prospective legal standards. In leaving the European Union, there is now no binding legal obligation on the UK government to ensure the updating of legal standards for such exposures in the workplace. This means that rules restricting exposure to cancer-causing substances might not always be updated in line with scientific discovery. That decision will be a question of priority and time given to it by government departments; and is subject to consideration by the HSE as they review their strategy under the leadership of a new chair and former minister, Sarah Newton.

The situation means that employers and public bodies will need to be vigilant and keep up with the latest science if they are not to fall foul of costly lawsuits. More importantly, it means that there will be tremendous pressure on the UK's science and health infrastructures to keep up to date with global research and to find practicable ways to prevent workers from developing avoidable cancers.

Some of the cancer-causing chemicals that the UK has agreed need further control might no longer be subject to planned controls. In 2019, the European Council agreed to changes to an earlier list of controls for 13 cancer-causing substances. The UK agreed that limits needed to be put in place to protect workers but argued for more time. There is now no guarantee that those safeguards will ever be in place.

One of the substances is formaldehyde, which is widely used in the funeral industry to enable dignified burial. The government had argued that it would take until 2024 for the UK industry to protect funeral home workers from cancer-causing levels of the substance, delaying the implementation of safeguards. Another area where Europe has proposed to make inroads in protecting workers relates to cytotoxic drugs, which are widely used by healthcare professionals and veterinarians in cancer treatments.

Whilst the UK regulations on the control of substances hazardous to health already require that carcinogens (and mutagens) are controlled to as low as reasonably practicable below a limit value, the limit value itself is key in driving control improvement. The BOHS is concerned that, unless the UK exposure limits are updated, based on the latest research and information, existing standards may be putting workers at elevated levels of risk when compared to workers doing similar tasks in the European Union.

# Guatemalan Association of Occupational Safety and Security

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Guatemala, in Central America, is the largest economy in our region, but it is also one of the poorest countries in Latin America, with a human development index of 0.651, below the world average of 0.731 and that of Latin American countries (0.759). Nonetheless, there are many industries operating in the country, related mainly to food-processing, mining, and agriculture. Most have incipient or non-existing occupational health and safety (OHS) programmes.

Historically, OHS regulation in Guatemala has been limited. For many years Guatemala only had one regulation, which was issued in 1958. It was not until 2014 that the OHS regulation was updated. Since then, there have been consistent advances in the OHS field in Guatemala. However, with the advances, knowledge gaps in occupational hygiene have become evident, highlighting the need for additional OHS professional training and guidelines.

With this in mind, the Guatemalan Association of Occupational Safety and Security (AGSSO) was established in 2017 with the support of a multidisciplinary group of OHS professionals. The AGSSO is a private non-profit organisation created to promote OHS. Since its inception, the AGSSO has been conducting training and events where all types of OHS practitioners participate to obtain more technical and soft skills.

The objectives of the AGSSO are:

1. To promote research and standardisation in OHS
2. To edit, publish and distribute technical material related to OHS



3. To generate change in OHS culture in Guatemala through technical and professional training within legal frameworks

In the past year, the AGSSO became a member of the IOHA. It is also a part of the Comité de las Américas Asociaciones de Higiene Industrial de Latinoamérica and the Red Panamericana de Higiene Ocupacional (REPHO). The AGSSO also has alliances with the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA), Centro de Ergonomía Aplicada (CENEA) and Centro Guatemalteco de Producción más Limpia.

In 2018, AGSSO members supported the translation of the ACGIH 2018 TLVs for biological exposure indices (BEIs) into Spanish. This allowed them to distribute the materials among OHS professionals in Guatemala. In 2019, the AGSSO launched the first diploma in industrial hygiene in Guatemala with the support of the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala and a number of certified industrial hygiene professionals from Latin America. The AGSSO has also conducted training courses and workshops on neuroleadership in OHS, and strategies for managing occupational exposures.

# The journey of mainstreaming industrial hygiene in Malaysia

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Malaysia has progressed in strengthening occupational safety and health (OSH) management in the country. With the theme *OSH Transformation* to inculcate preventive culture, the five-year strategic National OSH Master Plan (MP) 2016–2020 was developed to enhance the standard of OSH at the workplace. The OSH MP is expected to contribute to the reduced rate of occupational accidents and fatalities and thus assist the government in raising the quality of life of the people. The quality of working life is one of the elements contributing to the wellbeing of Malaysians. Appreciating the increasing trend of occupational diseases and poisoning reported, and the growing concern about workers' health risk at work places over the years, the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) of Malaysia has included 'Mainstreaming Industrial Hygiene (IH)' as one of the main strategies under the National OSH MP 2016–2020 to strengthen industrial hygiene management practices in the country. There are five programmes registered under the mainstreaming IH strategy, as shown in Figure 2.

One of the main OSH MP 2016–2020 key performance indicators (KPIs) is to increase reporting of occupational diseases and poisoning of workers by 30%. According to the DOSH, we have achieved a 65.4% increase from 2015 to 2019. Based on 2019 reporting, the top three problems reported were occupational noise-related hearing disorders (91%), occupational musculoskeletal disorders (4%), and occupational skin diseases (1%).

Despite the many hurdles and challenges faced in the country – particularly the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that has restricted movement and forced people to embrace the new normal of working – the plans registered under the mainstreaming IH strategy are close to completion. Nevertheless, strong support and fostered collaboration between various government bodies and agencies, associations, industries, and health and safety practitioners is required to ensure that the plans are executed and progress is made to meet the desired objectives. The high-impact programmes that contributed to the reporting

achievement include the formation of the Industrial Hygiene Catalyst Committee (IH2C), Basic Occupational Health (BOH), ergonomic risk assessment (ERA) tools, Systematic Occupational Health Enhancement Level Programme (SoHELP), SoHELP Do It Yourself (DIY), and Noise Exposure Regulations 2019.

The Malaysian Industrial Hygiene Association (MIHA) – the organisation of professionals dedicated to promoting industrial hygiene (IH) in Malaysia – has also played a pivotal role in realising the strategy. The MIHA focuses its activities on raising awareness, capability development, standards/guidelines development, and collaboration with other advocates of IH. Hence, the national collaboration, such as that via the Malaysian Federation for Occupational Safety and Health (MyFOSH), is essential to bring IH management and practices in Malaysia to a higher level. The 900+ MIHA members can only do so much but, through collaboration, we can leverage on the strength of the almost 8 000 MyFOSH members. At an international level, being part of the IOHA gives the MIHA opportunities to collaborate and exchange lessons learned and best practices with other peers, connecting with 35 member countries and covering almost 18 000 members.

There are still many challenges and efforts required to further boost and sustain good IH management practices in Malaysia, especially when the effects of health hazards are considered as long term. There is also a lack of drive to further invest in controlling the risks in view of current economic and business constraints aggravated by COVID-19, globally. Hence, continuous collaboration is the key to further improve IH management practices in Malaysia. We are hopeful that the new OSH-MP 2021–2025 will drive IH reform, especially in areas requiring most attention, and that it will continue to ensure optimal protection of workers' health.

*Note: The contents of this article are contributed through collaboration between the Malaysian Industrial Hygiene Association and the Department of Occupational Safety and Health of Malaysia.*



**Figure 2. Mainstreaming IH strategy as part of OSH MP 2016–2020**