

12th IOHA virtual International Scientific Conference

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Under the theme, *Bridging Gaps in OH Development, Opening New Horizons*, we have decided to make the 12th IOHA International Scientific Conference a virtual conference to ensure the safety of attendees. The conference will offer high-quality scientific and technical content, as well as a wide range of current topics in occupational hygiene (OH) fields, including the roles and experiences of the OH professional during the COVID-19 pandemic. The conference will bring many professionals together from the fields of OH, exposure science, toxicology, ergonomics, epidemiology, occupational medicine and health, and risk management. Professional development courses (PDCs) for continuing education, keynote speeches from nine distinguished professionals, 40+ symposia conveying various critical topics, special lectures on emerging topics by invited lecturers, and many papers and posters from international OH experts, will be on the programme.



There is still time to submit your presentation proposals as 28 February 2021 is the deadline for PDC, symposium, and special lecture proposals. The deadline for podium and poster proposals is 31 March 2021. Don't forget to register early and save! The IOHA 2021 advance rate registration closes on 31 May 2021. Attendees can save approximately 20% on standard registration. Visit the conference website for more details, proposal submissions, and online registration: www.ioha2021.org.

AIHA announcements

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The AIHA announces hybrid on-site and virtual AIHce EXP 2021 conference event

The American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) has announced that the annual American Industrial Hygiene Conference and Exposition (AIHce EXP) will take place on 24–26 May 2021 in Dallas, Texas, as a hybrid on-site and virtual event. Those willing and able to travel can attend events in person at the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center, under heightened safety protocols. Those unable to travel to attend the conference in person can attend an entirely virtual conference that will be held concurrently. Full registration for the combined on-site and virtual, or wholly virtual, experience includes access to session recordings on AIHce OnDemand, six-to-eight weeks after the conference. Register today and take advantage of the advance rates. Group discounts are available for individuals from the same company registering for either the in-person or the virtual AIHce EXP. To learn more, visit [Group Registration Rates](#).

Occupational and environmental health experts urge business owners to implement AIHA COVID-19 guidelines as new virus strain emerges

While business owners and consumers closely watch how the new, more readily-transmittable variant of SARS-CoV-2 develops, the occupational environmental health and safety (OEHS) profession is urging business owners, schools and other organisations to continue implementing practical science-based guidelines developed by the



AIHA. The comprehensive Back to Work Safely guidelines for small to mid-size businesses in 26 industry sectors provide recommendations on personal protective equipment (PPE), engineering controls, enhanced cleaning and disinfection, personal hygiene, and physical distancing. All guidelines are available in both English and Spanish. The AIHA has also issued guidelines addressing COVID-19-related topics, including engineering controls, and cleaning and disinfection in non-healthcare settings (all of which are also in both English and Spanish).

The AIHA offers major discounts on education products for IH/OH professionals in developing economies

To expand awareness and promote the importance of industrial/occupational hygiene (IH/OH) education across the globe, the AIHA offers digital versions of a series of PDF publications and e-learning courses at discounted prices, including the AIHA 'White Book', the *Noise Manual*, the 'Basic Principles of Occupational Hygiene' e-course, and many more. Use the discount code 'DEVNAT' to take advantage of this offer. Please note that the publications and e-learning courses are in English only.

AGSSO statement of worker rights

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From the beginning, man has adapted to environmental variations, climates, and social conditions, including hazardous exposures created in workplaces. The right to health is not only the absence of disease but, in an integral way, also a state of physical, mental and social wellbeing, as established by the World Health Organization (WHO). Safe and healthy work is linked to the dignity, equity and equality of the person. In this sense, prevention measures are aimed at minimising exposure to occupational hazards. Therefore, it is important to adopt a preventive, coherent and comprehensive approach to worker health and safety that informs all aspects of organisational operations, including policies, guidelines, processes, roles and



responsibilities. The health of workers constitutes a fundamental requirement for the economic success of a country. A healthy workforce is one of the most significant attributes of productivity. As a consequence, safe and healthy work has, as its primary function, the protection of individual health and wellbeing.

We conclude that "Occupational Health and Safety is a fundamental right of all workers".

The Breathe Freely campaign – a BOHS initiative to reduce occupational lung disease

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Despite decades of legislation and technical innovation, the United Kingdom (UK), like many other countries, continues to see no great diminution in the effects of occupational exposure to respiratory threats in recent years. Figures released late last year from the regulator, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), confirm that, despite some improvement, deaths from respiratory disease still account for the majority of occupational-linked fatalities in the UK. An estimated 12 000 people died from occupational lung disease in 2020, in comparison to 111 people who sadly died in workplace accidents. Indeed, some diseases (such as interstitial lung disease) are on the increase.

It is unlikely that this is exclusive to the UK. This is also likely to be one of the last sets of figures that provides a comparable statistical base for analysis of the impact of legislative and other interventions. This is because occupational respiratory illnesses are likely to be one of the major risk factors for poor outcomes in terms of COVID-19 infections. Looking at the global map for chronic respiratory mortality and the global map for COVID-19 deaths, there is a superficial correlation that might confirm this.

To put it bluntly, the global pandemic may have increased mortality among those who were exposed to respiratory hazards, but those deaths will be logged as COVID-19 deaths, rather than having arisen from occupational exposures. Much needs to be done to highlight that COVID-19 has almost certainly been rendered a more fatal virus because of occupational exposures. In the UK, the higher mortality among older males tracks the mortality rates arising from respiratory exposures.

Among survivors, 'long COVID' is likely to be the marker set for



respiratory illness, rather than chronic illness arising from respiratory exposures in the workplace. In some senses, the statistical imperative to address occupational respiratory threats is likely to be one of the significant victims of the pandemic.

Talking to cancer specialists in the UK, it is clear that we do not dig deep enough to determine whether cancers and other respiratory illnesses are occupational in nature. Family doctors don't ask, medical records don't flag, and specialists only focus on causes when the illness is rare and there is a research imperative to find the cause. How, then, can we determine the effectiveness of measures to protect respiratory health? How can we promote, on a national and international basis, the priority that workplace respiratory protection requires?

It is in this context that discussions between members of the Australian Institute for Occupational Hygiene (AIOH) and the British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS) have been progressing around Breathe Freely websites.

Many will be aware that, five years ago, the BOHS launched an ambitious campaign with construction and, latterly, manufacturing to highlight occupational respiratory risks. The Breathe Freely campaign spawned a number of activities, events and materials, but also a website with tools, information and guidance to help industry directly

GLOBAL EXPOSURE MANAGER

address the challenges of reducing harmful exposures (<https://www.breathefreely.org.uk/>). Over the years, there have been tens of thousands of visits to the website and downloads of content. In 2019, the BOHS agreed to freely share the content with the AIOH, which produced the wonderful Breathe Freely Australia website, <https://www.breathefreelyaustralia.org.au/>. The website contextualised the material to Australia and extended the content, presenting it in a slightly more accessible way. Subsequently, a site was co-developed by the New Zealand Occupational Hygiene Society (NZOHS) (<https://www.breathefreely.co.nz/>).

With each iteration, new content has been added and the site has been further developed. The value of extending the content of the Breathe Freely websites has been discussed by the BOHS and AIOH. Clearly, behind such an initiative lie the various complexities of issues, ranging from copyright protection to liability, and how and who assures that content is locally relevant. Nevertheless,



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both organisations can see huge value in sharing Breathe Freely's website content throughout the IOHA family. Obviously, translation may present huge opportunities to share English-language content further, despite any challenges.

We therefore welcome approaches from any occupational hygiene or industrial hygiene society that might think this is a useful way to develop a plan to present to the IOHA (and the BOHS and AIOH) boards, as the basis for collective global content-sharing to tackle this important issue. Please contact kevin.bampton@bohs.org if this is of interest to you.
