



NEWSLETTER

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LEADING THE EVOLUTION TOWARD ‘TOTAL WORKER HEALTH’ - NIOSH

There is increasing evidence that the work environment and the overall health of the workers within it are inextricably linked. Disease and injury, whether caused by work, nonwork activities, or lifestyle, reduce quality of life, opportunity, and income for workers and those dependent upon them. For employers, the collective burden of diminished workforce health and ability adversely impacts recruitment, retention, productivity, and, ultimately, economic viability.

– Dr. John Howard, Director, U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health ¹

For years now, there has been a steady convergence of occupational health and safety issues with those related to general employee health and work-balance issues in the workplace. This movement by occupational health and safety practitioners, health practitioners and government regulators has led to promoting more integrated approaches to safety and health for working people, especially in North America and Europe.

According to the U.S. [Centres for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), the current *Total Worker Health* initiative was an offshoot of the former *WorkLife Initiative* undertaken in 2005 by the CDC’s [National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health](#) (NIOSH). In June of 2011, the former NIOSH *WorkLife Initiative* officially became the [Total Worker Health](#) initiative with a new focus on identifying and promoting more integrated programs in the workplace. Most recently, NIOSH has been planning for an evolution of the initiative to more comprehensively address the wide range of factors that influence workers’ total health. *

What is Total Worker Health™ ?

NIOSH defines Total Worker Health™ as a comprehensive organizational strategy that integrates traditional occupational safety and health protection efforts with health promotion and other workplace activities to prevent illness and injury, regardless of cause, so that all workers have opportunities to achieve optimal levels of health and well-being. ²

As noted by NIOSH, the protection, preservation, and improvement of the health and well-being of all people who work are goals shared by workers, their families, and employers. Today, more than ever, there is increasing evidence that the work environment and the overall health, safety and well-being of the workers within it are strongly connected. Diminished health and injury, whether caused by work or resulting from non-work activities, reduces quality of life, opportunity and income for workers and those dependent upon them. Conversely, workplaces with low risk of injury and enhanced opportunities for the workers’ total health can lead to a vibrant, engaged and highly performing workforce.

* The majority of information related to this topic was obtained directly from the Web Sites of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

¹ *Leading the Evolution toward Total Worker Health:* John Howard, M.D. , Director, NIOSH, NIOSH E-News, Volume 9 Number 2 June 2011

² *What is Total Worker Health:* NIOSH Web site, June 2011: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/twh/totalhealth.html>

“Healthier organizations mean more productive employees.”

Extramural Centers of Excellence to Promote a Healthier Workforce

NIOSH continues to conduct research on the integration of health protection and health promotion through both internal and external avenues. Extramurally, NIOSH provided funds for three WorkLife Centers of Excellence to Promote a Healthier Workforce. According to NIOSH, the Centers are dedicated to ground-breaking research, translation and best practices of integrative approaches to protecting and promoting health in the workplace. An intramural program connects related work within NIOSH; elucidates and communicates current knowledge, successful approaches and challenges; and promotes the concepts and practices of total worker health to its partners and stakeholders.

Funding was provided to following Extramural Centers of Excellence (see recommended Web sites):

- ◆ *Iowa Healthier Workforce Center for Excellence* at the University of Iowa,
- ◆ *Center for Promotion of Health in the New England Workplace* at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell and the University of Connecticut, and
- ◆ *Harvard School of Public Health Center for Work, Health, and Well-being* at Harvard University:

Federal Employee Worksite Health and Wellness Initiative

NIOSH served as a member of a cross-government workgroup which in 2010 launched the [Federal Employee Worksite Health and Wellness Initiative](#). This particular project overseen by the [Office of Personnel Management](#) aims to create, implement and evaluate a comprehensive set of worker protection and health in federal government worksites. NIOSH has also served as a member of a cross-government workgroup launching the federal promotion programs on federal workplace campuses around the country.

NIOSH, along with the CDC, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Federal Occupational Health, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Health Resources Services Administration, and the Eagleson Institute will hold "*Healthier Federal Workers 2011, A New Symposium on the Health, Safety and Wellbeing of the Federal Workforce*". The symposium will take place on September 14-16, 2011 at Georgetown University in Washington DC. NIOSH Director, Dr. John Howard, will be a keynote speaker. He will be joined by over 25 other leading workplace health and safety experts. Federal workplace health and wellness, occupational health, human resources, safety, and other related professionals will attend sessions on the science of evidence-based prevention, specific strategies for engaging leadership and overcoming barriers in the implementation of workplace programs, engaging employees, and creating safe and healthy workplaces that optimize the health and well-being of workers and their families.

Recommended Reading:

- ◆ *Essential Elements of Effective Workplace Programs and Policies for Improving Worker Health and Wellbeing*: - U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/worklife/essentials.html>
- ◆ *WorkLife Transitions to Total Worker Health™*: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/twh/transition.html>

Recommended Web Sites:

- ◆ Total Worker Health – U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/twh/>
- ◆ Iowa Healthier Workforce Center for Excellence: <http://www.public-health.uiowa.edu/hwce/>
- ◆ Center for Promotion of Health in the New England Workplace: <http://www.uml.edu/centers/cph-new/>
- ◆ The Harvard School of Public Health Center for Work, Health, and Well-being: <http://centerforworkhealth.sph.harvard.edu/>

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