

International training program builds EHS capacity worldwide

By MARK KATCHEN, CIH

An issue of vital importance to the fields of occupational health and safety is the need to build global capacity through education and training. Many major multinational corporations and firms in the developing world are expanding into locations with limited inherent capability in the protection of workplace health and safety. In most countries, there is a shortage of adequately trained professionals, such as occupational physicians and nurses, occupational hygienists, ergonomists and other members of the occupational health multidisciplinary team.

Meeting the challenge

To meet the challenges of recruiting qualified occupational safety and health personnel, in 2006 a number of occupational hygienists from multinational corporations produced a paper with ideas to address the capacity challenge and set out options to grow skills using a modular development program ("Discussion Paper on Industry Needs for Occupational Hygiene" October 2006). For several years, the International Occupational Hygiene Association ("IOHA") has been actively collaborating with the group of individuals who have been working toward the development of international occupational hygiene training and qualifications. Proposals were presented and debated at conferences and workshops around the world including Australia, the United Kingdom, USA and Taiwan. The development scheme received feedback from the national occupational hygiene societies and the IOHA. Currently a proven and workable scheme of training modules has been run in a variety of locations and includes multiple language versions.

Initial funding of U.S. \$250,000 was secured to develop a series of training courses that are now successfully in use in a number of countries. The group working on the international education and training has now established itself under English

Law into the Occupational Hygiene Training Association (OHTA) and has formally signed a memorandum of understanding with IOHA, who has agreed to contribute some funds for the development of OHTA's website.

Modular training

The process of developing course materials involves commissioning expert authors and peer reviewers. The draft material is then piloted and refined, reviewed, copyrighted, and published to a website or access by course providers. Companies such as BP have tried and tested basic modules on fundamental principles, which have been run in many countries including Australia, China, Indonesia, Singapore, Spain, South Africa, the UK and Vietnam. The modules are written by specialists with practical experience in the respective areas of occupational hygiene and are subject to peer review and copyright approval to make them suitable for translation.

The traditional approach of sending trainees overseas is expensive and can only be used on a limited scale. The modular training concept provides a consistent format that can be deployed around the world, reducing costs and increasing the potential for local development. To create a sustainable training program, training must be delivered locally and be both accessible and affordable in order to meet the needs of the organizations funding the training.

The student assessment process has evolved from proposals developed by the British Occupational Hygiene Society Faculty of Occupational Hygiene and consultation with stakeholders. Students who successfully complete a module and pass an open book examination are given an Award of Satisfactory Course Completion recognizing their understanding of the subject taught and ability to apply their knowledge to answer questions. They must complete a personal learning program and submit a portfolio of project work within six months of completing

a course to receive an intermediate certificate of competence in that subject. Satisfactory award of six such certificates (four in mandatory modules and two in optional modules) will entitle the student to the full Intermediate International Certificate of competence in occupational hygiene.

Future prospects

An increasing number of providers are now experimenting with the modules. For example, the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) is planning to pilot one of these modules (Hazardous Materials) in June 2010 in Shanghai. The module will be taught in Mandarin with course materials available in English.

Importantly, several occupational hygiene accrediting bodies, including the American Board of Industrial Hygiene, British Faculty of Occupational Hygiene, and the Canadian Registration Board of Occupational Hygienists have signed a memorandum of agreement ("MOA") pledging to work toward developing a common platform for the credentialing (accreditation or certification) of occupational hygiene technicians/technologists that achieves international acceptance and recognition.

The signatories to the MOA believe the concept of modular training at the intermediate level can effectively provide a structured system of training and skill development by which intermediate technical accreditation (credentialing) can be attained. These courses may ultimately be recognized by university level programs as credit toward a baccalaureate or masters degree.

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