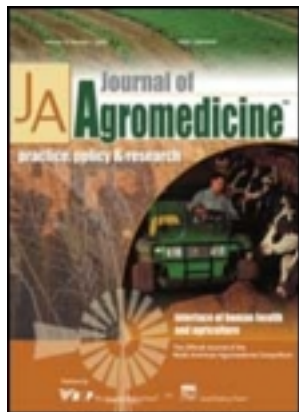


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Practical Safety and Health Risk Management in Production Agriculture: Report on the 2011 ASHCA Workshop

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CONFERENCE REPORT

Practical Safety and Health Risk Management in Production Agriculture: Report on the 2011 ASHCA Workshop

Barbara C. Lee, PhD
Dan M. Hair, MSS, CSP

ABSTRACT. Proven, evidence-based strategies were highlighted during “Practical Safety and Health Risk Management in Production Agriculture,” a Workshop hosted by the Agricultural Safety and Health Council of America (ASHCA), January 7, 2011, at Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta. The Workshop was co-located with AG CONNECT Expo 2011, a world trade show. The Workshop held special appeal to risk managers, agricultural employers, and insurers. Further, it provided insights for researchers and academics regarding future needs. The overriding principle that “being safe equates to being profitable” was evident. At a time when business—including agribusiness—is increasingly viewed as a major cause of social, environmental, and economic problems, employee safety can be embraced as a shared value by both business and society. Topics included culturally relevant training, safety competitions, training with a mobile safety trailer, reducing insurance premiums, and outcomes of a statewide agricultural safety certification program.

KEYWORDS. Agribusiness, agriculture, safety, interventions

For a third year, the Agricultural Safety and Health Council of America (ASHCA) convened an educational workshop intended to convey best management practices for reducing disease and injury among agricultural workers. The January 7, 2011, ASHCA event was co-located with the international AG CONNECT exhibition where more than a dozen other organizations were also convening agriculture-related

meetings and conventions. The Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta, Georgia, was the hub of “all things agriculture” in early January and ASHCA added its unique focus on worker safety to the mix.

This year’s event was promoted as “by producers, for producers” to highlight effective safety programs currently in place. This year’s content contrasted with previous years when the

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objective was to collate research and begin the process of translating research into practice for application by agricultural employers and work supervisors. Thus, the 2011 event held special appeal to risk managers, agricultural employers, and insurers. Further, it provided insights for researchers and academics regarding future needs. The overriding principle that “being safe equates to being profitable” was evidenced in all presentations.

William Nelson has served as Chair of ASHCA’s Board of Directors since its inception in late 2007. As Director of Corporate Giving for the CHS Foundation, Mr. Nelson provides financial support for many worthy safety endeavors, including youth leadership, cooperative extension outreach, and farm safety programs for children. Mr. Nelson opened the workshop with inspirational words regarding industry social responsibility trends that focus on the wellbeing of workers, and the communities in which they live. He described worker safety as a moral issue and ASHCA has an opportunity to inform the public of the implications of allowing unsafe practices to persist. We should no longer accept the fact that agricultural fatalities are 8 times the national average.

The keynote presentation, “Transforming Unsafe Agricultural Practices to the Ideal,” was given by Carol Keiser-Long, President of C-BAR Cattle Company. Ms. Keiser-Long offered an “ABC” formula for training employees to recognize and manage safety concerns. This presentation was followed by Gloria Bell of Driscoll, Inc., the largest producer of berries in the United States. Ms. Bell addressed “Safety Training for Field Workers” and grounded her presentation based on personal experiences as a migrant farm worker child. She elaborated upon the major advances in field worker training that have accompanied California regulations as well as global trade expectations for food safety. Driscoll’s success is credited with worker commitment. Their corporate approaches are based upon values, passion, humility, and trustworthiness. Ms. Bell concluded her remarks with her managerial observation that “Healthy and happy workers produce sweeter berries.” Again, the connection between safety and profitability was made.

How can an agricultural group use competition to teach workers about hazards? Brady Miller of the Texas Cattle Feeders Association (TCFA) gave a compelling presentation on his organization’s goal of creating a culture of safety through an annual competition, coordinated by their safety committee. Entries regarding safety strategies are submitted with photographs, blueprints, and explanations from individual ranchers as well as major feedlots. Committee members review the safety suggestions and think through the pros and cons of each approach, sometimes identifying potential dangers, which are then relayed back to the entrant. The judges announce the top three winners at the TCFA convention, in their newsletter, and on their Web site. The coveted first place prize is a steak feed dinner for all employees at the winner’s company or feedlot.

Educational programs warrant continuous evaluation and modification. Dr. Kerry Leedom Larson, representing the National Pork Board, gave a presentation on “Lessons Learned from the Pork Producers’ Safety System,” which had been launched in 2005. Among their key lessons were management needs to make a financial commitment to safety; regulations are often too vague for producers to act upon; and with a usable roadmap, producers are very willing to adopt safety programs especially those that include checklists and policy guides.

Concurrent sessions required attendees to make a difficult choice between presentations. Session A addressed three topics for producers concerned with highway transportation, confined spaces, and dairy operations. “Ag Machinery Illumination Safety Act and New High Speed Tractor Standards” was presented by Mike Weber, Manager of Safety Services for the Association of Equipment Manufacturers (AEM), which represents all major tractor makers in the United States. Mr. Weber described the proposed consensus-driven standards, awaiting Congressional approval, to change highway regulations. Dr. Bill Field of Purdue University described progress being made to quantify the problem of confined spaces related to injuries and fatalities. Concerns arise with inconsistent or unclear standards, codes, and definitions. The grain industry is especially interested in

reducing the record number of grain engulfment deaths these past few years. "Loss Prevention on Northeast Dairy Farms" was presented by Lee Hipp, Senior Loss Prevention Consultant for Agri-Services, Inc. Mr. Hipp gave an extensive photographic overview of common hazards and their remedies on dairies. He described the farm audit approach used by insurers to motivate dairy owners to rectify hazards on their farms. This evidence-based program is highly recommended for large dairies that may be the focus of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) inspectors.

Session B topics included information of interest to feed yard operators, employers of labor-intensive field crops, and employers requiring supervisors to increase their focus on safety. Gordon Moore, Safety Director of Hitch Enterprises, ensured participants were attentive when he tossed out his lasso and convinced his audience that taking on-site safety training via a mobile trailer was a proven strategy. Mr. Moore explained that using a fully equipped safety training trailer allows for more frequent hands-on training and appeals to managers and employees who might be reluctant to step away from their work setting. Since California passed heat illness prevention regulations in 2005, a number of approaches have been tested. As Director of Safety for Grimmway Enterprises, one of California's largest agricultural companies, Joel Sherman needed to engage all levels of management and workers to be compliant with state law. Mr. Sherman described how he has continually refined their Heat Illness Prevention Program. There are benefits reaped in terms of worker safety and satisfaction when practical interventions are adopted in warm-weather working conditions. A third presentation emphasized that farmers and ranchers spend endless hours and energy tilling, feeding, and watering their commodities. However, the same nurturing is not always afforded to creating a safe workplace. Rick Gastelum, Safety Director of Washington State Farm Bureau, provided an overview of his supervisory training program and its success in promoting safety in their state's agricultural industry.

An objective of this ASHCA workshop was to enhance networking among producers

with common concerns and interests. The luncheon event was arranged by table topics: live-stock handling, motorized equipment, confined spaces, insurance and injury data, communications, and supervisory training. A designated discussion leader sat at each table. Subsequent evaluation feedback revealed this was the most popular component of the event, since people became quite engaged in their conversations, sharing business cards and agreeing to follow-up with technical assistance if requested.

An afternoon plenary session included a description of the California Agricultural Safety Certification Program by Amy Wolfe, Executive Director of AgSafe. With over a decade of experience, evaluation, and continual refinement, this 18-hour program has become a model for supervisor training. To date, more than 500 individuals have completed the program in English or Spanish. Having a certificate of completion becomes a matter of pride and commitment that influences the adoption and monitoring of safety practices in work settings across the state.

Dan Hair of Workers Compensation Fund (WCF) is the ASHCA Board of Directors' Vice-Chair and this workshop's chairman. Mr. Hair gave the final presentation on "What Insurance Companies Look for to Reduce Premiums." Details regarding insurers' pricing methods were discussed with emphasis on those safety activities most likely to produce favorable pricing. He emphasized that managers' behaviors are the most critical factor in reducing workers' compensation premiums.

Other features of this event included a welcome reception and ASHCA business meetings. Additionally, recognition was given to Dr. George Conway, NIOSH Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing Program Leader for being named the "2011 Leader in the Field" by the *Journal of Agromedicine*. Evaluation feedback deemed this workshop a success, noting the most effective features were networking, brief (20-minute) presentations that highlighted "take-home" messages, and the diversity of people with common interests but different backgrounds. Many of the PowerPoint presentations are available for download on the ASHCA Web site (www.ashca.com) or by request to the speaker.

PHOTOS: Practical Safety & Health Risk Management in Production Agriculture - ASHCA Workshop, January 7, 2011, Atlanta, Georgia, USA. For a third year, the Agricultural Safety and Health Council of America (ASHCA) convened an educational workshop intended to convey best management practices for reducing disease and injury among agricultural workers. Topics included: culturally relevant training, safety competitions, training with a mobile safety trailer, reducing insurance premiums, and outcomes of a statewide agricultural safety certification program. The workshop event was co-located with the international AG CONNECT trade show (color photos available online).

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PHOTOS: (Continued).

