

From *Environmental Health News*, Spring 1990

Department of Environmental Health History: Part I (1950 – 1960)

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Consider the following problems:

- workers at a food processing plant want to know whether the chlorine gas used to disinfect food is affecting their health
- the Division of Industrial Safety and Health - now Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) - at the Washington Department of Labor and Industries wants help with analysis of complex chemical mixture
- local industries and government agencies need to hire additional industrial hygienists.

In Washington, labor, public agencies and industry with problems like these can turn to the Department of Environmental Health at the University of Washington for solutions.

The Department of Environmental Health provides occupational health services to the Department of Labor and Industries, and to business and labor upon request. In addition, it is responsible for graduate training and for conducting research in the field of occupational safety and health. Since 1963 these activities have been financed in part by workers' compensation funds. Currently, about a third of the department's budget is appropriated by the state legislature to assist in funding occupational safety and health teaching, research and service programs.

Background

In Washington, industrial hygiene services were first provided by the Department of Health in 1942 with support from the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS). That agency provided services to companies and conducted studies at the request of the Department of Labor and Industries, management, labor and others.

At the end of the 1940's, the state legislature cut appropriations for public health, in keeping with a general trend throughout the country. Beginning in 1950, the USPHS no longer funded specific state public health activities. In Washington, the industrial hygiene section was abolished and its budget (\$33,390) used to support the rest of the department.

Members of the state Board of Health resisted the total elimination of industrial hygiene services, suggesting that they be provided by the University of Washington. The Health Department's industrial hygiene laboratory equipment, supplies, files, and two staff members were transferred to the University of Washington Medical School.

Environmental Research Laboratory, 1951-1961

In March 1951, the Environmental Research Laboratory was set up under the direction of the Departments of Medicine, Engineering and Meteorology at the University of Washington. The laboratory was to provide industrial hygiene services for a fee and to conduct grant-supported research in industrial hygiene and industrial medicine. The laboratory also provided services under contract with the Department of Labor and Industries.

In mid-1954 the Laboratory became the responsibility of the Department of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, in the School of Medicine. Major studies were conducted in aluminum, steel, printing and plywood industries at the request of the Department of Labor and Industries, which also largely supported the service activities. Direct requests from industry were few and funding needs

were continuous. In 1961, seeking to direct the Laboratory toward teaching and research, the Department of Public Health and Preventative Medicine proposed to terminate the service activities.

Events Leading to U.S. Public Health Service Report

In response to the planned elimination of industrial hygiene services at the University, the Division of Safety in the Department of Labor and Industries proposed to develop an industrial hygiene section. This was supported by the labor unions, who wanted all activities affecting labor in the Department of Labor and Industries. It was opposed, however, by the Association of Washington Industries (now Association of Washington Business), which wanted research and service separate from regulatory functions. The Association of Washington Industries favored the University as the home of Industrial hygiene.

The Governor's office was besieged by proponents of business and labor, each urging their own solution. Industrial hygienists wrote from all over in support of placing the industrial hygiene section in the health department, while labor representatives urged that the section be in the labor department.

The U.S. Public Health Service Report

In 1962, Governor Alfred D. Rosellini requested that the USPHS conduct a study of occupational health problems in Washington and make recommendations for an effective program. Henry N. Doyle of the USPHS Division of Occupational Health, directed the study and a committee was appointed to advise on its scope and design.

The Doyle Report noted a lack of industrial hygiene services in Washington, especially in small plants, as well as a general lack of preventive medical and nursing services. The report recommended that an occupational health program should encompass two elements:

- the recognition, evaluation, prevention and control of industrial health hazards, and
- health maintenance activities, such as in-plant employee health services and educational programs for the detection and prevention of illness.

Because of a lack of consensus in identifying a lead agency, the USPHS recommended that responsibility be divided among the State Department of Labor and Industries, the State Department of Health and the University of Washington as follows:

1. The State Department of Labor and Industries—conduct routine industrial hygiene inspections, establish an industrial hygiene laboratory, and train its safety inspectors in better recognition of health hazards;
2. The State Department of Health—coordinate and promote occupational health activities in industry, conduct occupational epidemiological studies, provide medical consultative services to Labor and Industries, and assist industry in the development of programs to combat chronic disease;
3. The University of Washington, through the Environmental Research Laboratory—provide industrial hygiene services to industry in coordination with the Department of Labor and Industries and continue its laboratory and teaching program in industrial hygiene and occupational health.

The USPHS also recommended that the activities of the Department of Health and those of the University of Washington be financed through the Washington State Fund, which administers the industrial insurance program.

- 1936 US PHS began funding state industrial hygiene programs
- 1942 The State Health Department began providing industrial hygiene programs
- 1950 US PHS stopped funding state industrial hygiene programs
- 1950 The State Health Department abolished its industrial hygiene section
- 1951 The Environmental Research Laboratory was created and administered by an interdepartmental committee
- 1954 The Environmental Research Laboratory was put under the Department of Public Health and Preventive Medicine

From Environmental Health News, Autumn 1990

Department of Environmental Health History: Part II (1961-1990)

From the Laboratory to the Factory—Department of environmental Health Contributions to Occupational Health in Washington State

In the last edition of Environmental Health News, the early days of the Department of Environmental Research Laboratory, were described. The Laboratory, created in 1951, provided industrial hygiene and industrial medicine. Faced with continual funding problems. The Laboratory attempted to eliminate its service functions in 1961. In 1962, the US Public Health Service recommended that the Environmental Research Laboratory continue its service and teaching program with funding from the state.

Senate Bill 323

Following the Public Health Service study, and through efforts led by the Association of Washington Industries, Senate Bill 323 was passed unanimously in 1963 to provide for an occupational and environmental research facility in the School of Medicine. Funds for constructing and equipping the facility as well as for operating the unit were to be appropriated, one-half from the accident fund and the other half from the medical aid fund of the Washington State Fund. The accident fund is supported by premiums paid by employers; the medical aid fund is supported half by employers and half by workers. This assured that both labor and industry would have an interest in the program.

After the passage of the legislation, the Environmental Health Division (formerly the Environmental Research Laboratory) was expanded to fulfill its increased responsibilities. In 1970, the school of Public Health and Community Medicine was formed, and the Environmental Health Division became the Department of Environmental Health.

Washington Industrial Safety and Health Act

Following the passage of the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, Washington became one of the first states to administer an OSHA-approved state program in occupational safety and health. In 1971 the Washington Industrial Safety and Health Act (WISHA) was approved by the U.S. Department of Labor. This was followed by a memorandum of understanding entered into by the University of Washington which became part of the overall state program. Under this plan, the Department of Environmental Health acts as a consultant to the Division of Industrial Safety and Health, Department of Labor and Industries, in much the same way that the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) does to the U.S. Department of Labor.

Northwest Center for Occupational Health and Safety

In 1977, the Department of Environmental Health received an Educational Resource Center (ERC) training grant from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). The center, one of 14 nationally, continues to provide graduate courses in occupational medicine and industrial

hygiene and safety, as well as courses in occupational health nursing given by the Department of Community Health Care Systems (now Psychosocial and Community Health) in the School of Nursing. The Center has an active continuing education program in these disciplines. The director of the Occupational Medicine Program is also director of the Harborview Occupational Medicine Clinic, providing the graduate students with an opportunity for clinical experience. This federal funding recognizes the department as a regional center for excellence, and has permitted a better integration of the occupational medicine, nursing, and industrial hygiene and safety teaching programs. It also provided student stipends which increased the number of students, and permitted expanded outreach activities in Alaska, Oregon and Idaho.

Current Service Activities of the Department

In the early 1980's the industrial hygiene service was reorganized in the Field Research and Consultation Group, consisting of four industrial hygienists, one of whom is also an occupational health nurse, a medical consultant and a program assistant. The Field Group is often called upon to act as a neutral party and fact finder. This team

- initiates investigations into special problem areas, often in small businesses
- provides advice to labor, management and Labor and Industries
- conducts research on emerging occupational health problems

The industrial hygiene analytical laboratory provides the following kinds of support for the state-supported Research and service function:

- Analysis of samples obtained during workplace investigations
- Analysis of samples obtained from monitoring on the U.W. campus
- Analysis and interpretation of complex samples for the state laboratory
- Development of analytical and sampling methods to meet the needs of the Department of Labor and Industries

The Department of Environmental Health also provides training for state industrial hygienists and safety inspectors upon request.

Summary

The cooperative interagency program that evolved from the Doyle Report of more than a quarter of a century ago gives employers, employees and the Department of Labor and Industries access to the knowledge and talents of a major academic department. It encourages faculty, staff and students to maintain an involvement in applied occupational health research and service. These collaborative links have led to a strong occupational health and safety program in Washington, one which is attracting national interest.

Note: Goldy Kleinman and Sharon Morris are emeritus members of our faculty who specialized in occupational health policy.