

Local Health Departments and the NIOSH Health Hazard Evaluation Program: Working Together



**Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention**
National Institute for Occupational
Safety and Health

The Health Hazard Evaluation (HHE) Program provides a free service to workplaces throughout the United States. This document describes the HHE Program and how you can use its services to help meet your public health mission.

Workplace Safety and Health is Public Health

In serving their communities, local health departments may be asked by the public, by local

employers, or by state or federal occupational health programs to assist with addressing workplace health and safety concerns. They may also identify such concerns through public health surveillance and monitoring. Some

departments have staff with occupational safety and health expertise, others do not. The HHE Program offers workplace evaluation services and information to all health departments.

The HHE Program can:

- **Provide consultation for your investigation**
- **Do its own investigation and report the findings to you**
- **Work collaboratively with you on an investigation**

If you are aware of concerns that exposures or conditions in a workplace may be making employees sick, contact the HHE Program for assistance. You also can recommend that the employer or employees contact the HHE Program. Employees can ask that the HHE Program not share their name with the employer. The form to request a health hazard evaluation can be found on our website at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/hhe/request.html>.

Consider the HHE Program when any of these situations arise:

- Exposures to unregulated agents are occurring
- Conditions and exposures are causing health effects
- The situation represents an emerging hazard with exposures and health effects that are not well understood
- New sampling methods need to be developed to accurately assess the work environment
- The effectiveness of exposure controls needs to be evaluated

What is the Health Hazard Evaluation Program?

The HHE Program is part of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It is federally mandated to serve workplaces throughout the United States. Since the early 1970s, the HHE Program has provided free evaluations to thousands of workplaces in every industry sector including healthcare, manufacturing, services, transportation, agriculture, construction, and government. From hospitals, schools, office buildings, restaurants, and railway stations to metal foundries, shooting ranges, laboratories, and automotive centers, the HHE Program helps ensure that employees in small and large workplaces alike have safe and healthy work environments. The HHE Program is not an enforcement or rule-making program and does not issue fines or citations to workplaces.

The HHE Program has experience in many areas, including hazard identification, exposure assessments, health surveys, medical tests, and engineering controls. Our mandate is to focus on health rather than traumatic injury.

The HHE Program staff of about 50 experts includes occupational health physicians, epidemiologists, industrial hygienists,

engineers, psychologists, and a health communicator who work together in a team customized to respond to each request. Some of our staff are fluent in Spanish, and the program has the capacity to work with employees who speak or read other languages. We can translate documents into many languages to allow all employees to participate in evaluations and learn from our materials.

Hazards that can be evaluated include:

- **Physical agents, such as heat and noise**
- **Biological agents, such as mold**
- **Infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis and influenza**
- **Chemical substances, such as solvents, metals, and particulates**
- **Workplace conditions, such as ergonomics and work stress from excessive workload demands or bullying**

What happens when you request an HHE or make a referral?

Investigators assess background information and decide if an on-site evaluation is needed. In some cases, the HHE Program is able to provide assistance without visiting the workplace. This is often the case with common hazards or health conditions that we have studied extensively, such as mold in schools or office buildings, diesel exhaust in fire stations, or cancer in nonindustrial settings. Investigators gather information by phone from the employer and employees, and review reports about exposure, illness, and injury. On the basis of this information, the HHE Program issues a letter with its conclusions and recommendations. The HHE Program may also suggest other agencies or organizations that may help.

If an on-site evaluation is needed, health and safety experts go to the workplace at a time agreed upon by all involved. The HHE Program may:

- Observe work processes and practices
- Meet with managers and talk with employees
- Interview or survey employees about their health
- Carry out medical tests
- Review reports of exposure, injury, and illness
- Measure exposures in the work environment
- Evaluate existing exposure controls

When the HHE Program gets a request directly from a local health department, it does not have the authority to investigate the workplace without the consent of the employer. Sometimes, however, an investigation can be done using the public health authority of your agency.

When individual exposure measurements or medical tests are done on employees, the HHE Program sends the results directly to each participant. Summary results also are shared with employer and employee representatives without revealing employees' identities.

At the conclusion of an on-site evaluation, investigators prepare a report containing recommendations on ways to reduce or eliminate any identified

hazards. In these reports, you may find information you can use in your work, especially when encountering an unfamiliar issue.

These reports are public documents that are available for

free on the HHE Program's website. The report does not identify the workplace by name. Search the database of HHE reports at <http://www2a.cdc.gov/hhe/search.asp>.

Although the HHE Program has no enforcement authority, evidence shows that our recommendations are often acted on to help create healthier workplaces. Improving workplaces can improve employee productivity and reduce workers' compensation costs and medical expenses.

The HHE Program operates a bit differently than the CDC Epi-Aid program, with which you may be familiar. If you contact us, we can discuss the best way to meet your needs.

For more information about the HHE Program visit <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/hhe>.

If you want to discuss a particular situation, please contact us.

- **Phone: 513-841-4382**

Ask for the Branch Chief

- **Email: HHERequestHelp@cdc.gov**



Promoting productive workplaces through safety and health research

DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2014–113 (revised 05/2023)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26616/NIOSH PUB2014113revised052023>