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Osha Reaches Out With New Education Center

Occupational Health, Safety Instructors Will Travel Throughout Wisconsin

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By Ellen Williams-Masson

Capital Region businesses will have a new venue for occupational health and safety training beginning this summer due to a partnership between UW-Whitewater and Indiana University at Bloomington.

The new Heartland Safety and Health Education Center is one of eight sites selected by the U. S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) from a national competitive application process.

OSHA relies on a network of education centers throughout the nation to complement its OSHA Training Institute (OTI) in Arlington Heights, Ill.

The nonprofit OTI education centers receive no money from OSHA and trained more than 27,000 people in 2007. An additional half-million people received safety and health hazards instruction through OSHA's Outreach Training program, which is also facilitated by the centers.

Cheryl Holmes, senior lecturer in the Department of Applied Health Science at IU-Bloomington, is the director of Heartland Center. Andrew Kapp, Ph.D., associate professor of the Department of Occupational and Environmental Safety and Health at UW-Whitewater, is the associate director.

Holmes, Kapp and staff from both universities form the core of the Heartland Center, an administrative unit that will send instructors throughout Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio to offer training wherever it is needed.

Instructors and course managers will be hired from a network of safety and health professionals in the region, including faculty and staff at both universities.

"Where the demand is, we are going to deliver the courses," Kapp said. "The training is noncredit and designed for employers and employees in both the private and public sectors. We are very keen on giving employers what they need."

The center is soliciting input from regional businesses to determine where and when to offer particular courses.

In addition to OSHA standards like the 10- and 30-hour manufacturing and construction courses for supervisors and employees, the Heartland center will schedule a variety of short courses on topics like:

- * Electrical safety
- * Machine guarding
- * Ergonomics
- * Industrial hygiene

The center will also offer one-week OSHA "train the trainer" courses, which authorize instructors to teach construction and general industry safety as part of the OSHA Outreach Training Program.

OSHA director Kim Stille of the Madison area office said the Heartland center will make training more accessible for Capital Region businesses by operating "in their backyard."

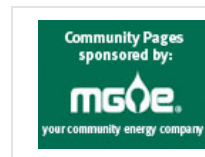
"Say an employer wants to go out and train their own people - they have 20 employees and it would be much more cost beneficial for that employer to train their own employees rather than sending all 20 employees to a training center - in order to be considered OSHA certified, they have to go through one of these training classes," Stille said.

"The education centers put forward the training in a fashion that is understandable, and they also provide a networking resource as well as someone (employers) can go to to ask day-to-day questions that makes it much easier to interpret."

Ken Alderden, senior risk control manager for The Murphy Insurance Group in Waunakee, provides safety training for his company's customers, many of whom work in construction. He estimated that he has trained more than 200 people in the last few years and was enthusiastic about returning to Whitewater for OSHA refresher courses.

"Any opportunity that we have to provide a higher level of service than our competition, The Murphy Insurance Group likes to offer," Alderden said. "As a UW-Whitewater alumnus, I am looking for opportunities to go back once and a while."

OSHA COMPLIANCE IS ALSO FOR SMALL FIRMS



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OSHA compliance is not only a concern for large businesses, providing a safe working environment is a legal requirement for small businesses, too.

"The federal OSHA rules mandate there has to be an employee-employer relationship, so if an employer has an employee - even one employee - it's enough to fall under federal OSHA jurisdiction," Stille said. "Studies have demonstrated that employers with good safety and health policies have successfully decreased their worker compensation costs, improved product quality and employee morale, and reduced employee absences and turnovers."

OSHA regulations are generally hazard-specific and are grouped into two codes, the 1910 series for general industries and the 1926 series for construction industries.

Understanding the requirements for OSHA compliance can seem daunting, but Stille said the agency has stepped up training to help businesses comply.

"The agency is trying to be far more responsive than we had in previous decades in terms of educating employers as to what their rights, responsibilities, what the rules and regulations of how to comply are," Stille said.

WILL MY BUSINESS BE INSPECTED?

OSHA's nonretaliation policy ensures that informational inquiries won't trigger an inspection, but there are five circumstances virtually guaranteed to have OSHA knocking at your company's door: , * A fatality

- * A complaint
- * Referral by a medical professional or building inspector
- * High injury/illness rate
- * The presence of a particular hazard or substance, like lead.

If OSHA does visit a work site and identify hazards, the agency may issue citations and/or assess penalties. Working with OSHA instead of viewing the agency as an enemy can help both organizations reach the goal of a safer workplace for employees.

"The employer can come in and meet with me, talk to me about the citation or penalty, what they have to do to comply, what their commitment is to the safety and health of their employees, and I will work with them to try and make it as minimum pain as possible," Stille said.

TRAINING PROVIDES A SAFER WORKPLACE

Daniel Karamanski, occupational safety manager at University of Wisconsin System Administration , has already contacted Kapp for information about training opportunities for employees of the UW system.

"It's helpful to have training to remind people about specific hazards inherent in their jobs," Karamanski said. "Even (when safety) is more common sense, it is helpful to have the reminder because with repetition in a job task you can sometimes forget that the hazard exists there."

With a new OSHA education center in the state, Capital Region businesses will have easier access to the training they need to maintain a safer workplace and protect their most valuable asset - their employees.

"Safety and health is still something that we take for granted today, but it shouldn't be," Kapp said. "It's something we always need to be diligent on."

For more information, contact Dr. Kapp at kapp@uw.edu , (262) 472-5423, or view the OSHA site at www.osha.gov.

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