Worker Training Activities at the World Trade Center Complex

According to the U.S. National Response Team's report on *Environmental Emergencies*, "Each year, our environment and communities are threatened by over 30,000 hazardous chemical releases, oil discharges, and other toxic spills. Are You Ready?" On September 11, no one was ready. The attacks and the resultant destruction constituted a national environmental emergency. The NIEHS and the grantees of the Worker Education and Training Program (WETP) overwhelmingly responded to the call from New York City and Washington, D.C. The WETP, through its grantees, today is still providing health and safety training and other support for the workers at the World Trade Center (WTC) complex.

A gaping pit is in the center of the WTC complex. This work site is one of the largest demolition projects in the United States. The risks associated with the safety and health hazards at the site continue to change because of the transitions between recovery, demolition, and construction. And the risks are numerous: exposure to various lung irritations (e.g., asbestos, volatile organic compounds such as Freon, particulate matter, and combustion products), confined space entry, structural stability issues, fall hazards, heavy metals exposures, and abrasions from material contained in the rubble. John Graham, Master Trainer for the New York City Carpenters Labor Technical College (NY Carpenters), goes to the site to perform health and safety training under NIEHS supplemental funding. He is still amazed that many of the current workers on the site do not have the necessary health and safety training. On average, thousands of workers are at the WTC at any given time, working for multiple contractors. New workers come on board every day. Who ensures that all of these workers have the requisite health and safety training, personal protective equipment, and certification?

The worker training program developed by NIEHS grantees, which includes a three-hour WTC site safety and health orientation and a train-the-trainer program, has been used by 55 unions, employers, and governmental representatives to train approximately 1,300 construction workers, including most of the building and construction trade workers who have been trained as of February 2002. This NIEHS-sponsored training has been coordinated by the Center to Protect Workers' Rights (CPWR) and the International Union of Operating Engineers. Also, the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) has worked vigorously over the past eight months to reestablish the hazardous materials management capability of the New York City Fire Department. As the work continues, more skilled support personnel will be needed to rebuild and clean up this area and the contaminated buildings adjacent to the WTC complex. From the operating engineers, who manned one of the first Hazmat mobile units and provided respiratory equipment and testing, to the IAFF, NY Carpenters, Laborers AGC Education and Training Fund, CPWR, and all of the other health and safety support at the WTC site, workers have begun to receive this critically needed training.

Contact Sharon D. Beard at wetp@niehs.nih.gov or visit the Web site at http://www.niehs.nih.gov/wetp.