**Stephanie Pratt**

**PS:** What prompted NIOSH to create a Center for Motor Vehicle Safety?

**Stephanie:** Motor vehicle crashes have been the leading cause of work-related fatalities since data were first collected in the 1980s. Motor vehicle safety is a concern that cuts across all industry sectors, so it made sense for NIOSH to mount a coordinated effort to address this urgent worker safety problem. The NIOSH Center for Motor Vehicle Safety (NCMVS) is hosted by the Division of Safety Research in Morgantown, WV, but many other individuals and programs in other NIOSH units across the U.S. make important contributions to the center.

**PS:** Describe your position with NCMVS.

**Stephanie:** As coordinator, I am responsible for developing and promoting the NIOSH program in motor vehicle safety across the agency and with external partners. One of my primary roles is to represent NIOSH and the center. This involves meeting with other federal agencies, private-sector partners and nongovernmental organizations to discuss potential collaborations; communicating information about the center and its work at scientific and industry-based conferences; and serving on consensus standards committees, internal and external expert panels, review panels and steering committees.

In addition, it is important that I maintain awareness of current research, products and partnerships inside NIOSH and in the research community at large. This helps me offer NIOSH colleagues general direction for areas where research is needed, and it also helps me bring together project teams. To the extent I can, I also try to stay active in my own areas of interest, which are to analyze injury and fatality data on work-related crashes, explore a combination of regulatory and employer-led approaches for managing work-related road safety, and examine the role of public- and private-sector organizations in promoting global road safety.

**PS:** NCMVS launched in December 2010. How has it expanded in terms of size and research?

**Stephanie:** The center is not a brick-and-mortar facility, nor is it a distinct administrative unit within NIOSH. Rather, it is a virtual center that brings together scientists from many disciplines working in eight different cities with a shared goal of reducing the toll of work-related motor vehicle crashes. In addition, NIOSH involvement in motor vehicle safety did not begin with the designation of the center in 2010; the agency began to build a program around 2000.

Since the center was established, more NIOSH scientists have proposed research projects in motor vehicle safety. As the NIOSH program has evolved, it has been data-driven, with two major focus areas: preventing crashes and injuries of truck drivers, who account for around 40% of work-related crash fatalities; and preventing crashes and injuries among other high-risk worker groups within the remaining 60%. In effect, this approach balances frequency and risk. For the other 60% of fatalities, NIOSH has begun to carve out areas of specialization in certain industries and occupations at high risk. These include firefighting, law enforcement, ambulance safety, and the oil and gas extraction industry.

In cooperation with NIOSH’s Global Collaborations program, the center also devotes some effort to engage with partners in international organizations, multinational corporations and nongovernmental organizations to improve road safety for workers around the world. I represent NIOSH in the UN Road Safety Collaboration, which serves to remind me that, for our customers, the boundaries of work-related road safety extend far beyond U.S. borders. Some aspects of road risk are not major workplace safety issues for U.S. employers in the domestic market, yet they are extremely important for U.S. companies with global operations. There is also a great deal for the U.S. to learn from how other countries manage and regulate road safety in the workplace.

**PS:** What is the most significant finding to come out of the center?

**Stephanie:** Because our program is so diverse, it is difficult to name just one. I’ll highlight a couple of examples that demonstrate the scope of the center’s work. One finding comes from the NIOSH program of anthropometric research, the scientific measurement of body dimensions. Our research shows that truck drivers of both sexes are significantly heavier than individuals of the same age in the general population, about 30 lb heavier for men and 34 lb heavier for women.
heavier for women. This information will enhance safety by helping manufacturers design truck cabs with improved visibility, better access to controls and seat belts that will better accommodate today’s truck drivers. Another timely finding comes from an analysis of fatalities in the oil and gas extraction industry. Many worker safety concerns are related to the growth in hydraulic fracturing to extract natural gas, but our analysis shows that motor vehicle crashes continue to be the leading cause of work-related fatalities in the oil and gas industry and that the fatality rate is significantly higher than for most other industries.

**PS:** How does NCMVS use its research to effect change?

**Stephanie:** When we plan a research project, we work with stakeholders up front to ensure that our research is relevant, and to ensure that others are interested in the findings and are in a position to act on them. We also think ahead to what the products of the research will be and how best to communicate that information to our stakeholders. We then distribute those products to those who are in the best position to make changes in the workplace. The center’s products are used in various ways:- to provide injury prevention information to employers and workers, to encourage changes in industry practices, to contribute to the development of standards and regulations, and to guide future research. We prepare information products targeted directly to employers and workers. One example is a multimedia campaign to educate truck drivers about good sleep hygiene to reduce driver fatigue. This combines radio spots on satellite radio stations for truckers, printed brochures and a website. Another example is two upcoming fact sheets on young drivers in the workplace; one of these is directed to employers, and the other to young workers and their parents.

Another very important area for us in motor vehicle safety is to contribute to the work of consensus standards committees. I have served on the committee for ANSI/ASSE Z15.1, Safe Practices for Motor Vehicle Operations, since it was organized in 2001. Z15 is the first comprehensive U.S. standard to set requirements for any public- or private-sector organization that operates any size or type of motor vehicle in doing business, whether or not its vehicles and drivers are covered by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration regulations. In addition, I serve on the U.S. committee for the new ISO 39001 standard, Road Traffic Safety Management Systems—Requirements With Guidance for Use. NIOSH is also represented on various standards committees related to the design and crashworthiness of ambulances, committees that are run by groups such as the Society of Automotive Engineers, NFPA and National Truck Equipment Association.

**PS:** What challenges has the NCMVS faced and how has it overcome them?

**Stephanie:** NIOSH has offices in eight cities spanning four time zones. It can be a challenge to work across all these locations and organizational units, and part of building the center necessarily involves encouraging some shifting of priorities. However, we have had strong support from top-level NIOSH leaders, which has been instrumental in raising the profile of motor vehicle safety across the institute and in encouraging our researchers to develop new research ideas. We are also fortunate to have strong telecommunications resources that make it possible for us to collaborate across geographic locations.

**PS:** What has NCMVS done to raise awareness about motor vehicle safety in the safety and health arena?

**Stephanie:** Through established partnerships, the center can reach large groups of employers by distributing its own products and by publicizing high-quality products developed by partners. The ANSI/ASSE Z15.1 standard is a great example. Since the Z15 Committee was convened by ASSE in 2001, NIOSH has been involved in drafting and revising the standard, and it has also promoted the standard through its motor vehicle safety website and through conference presentations. I presented and was a panelist at ASSE’s Safety 2013 in a session devoted to the practical use of ANSI/ASSE Z15.1.

Another example is the strong relationships that NIOSH researchers in Anchorage, AK, and Denver, CO, have built with safety and health managers in the oil and gas extraction industry. They are collaboratively developing and communicating best practices in motor vehicle safety management for the industry. NIOSH also has a longstanding relationship with the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS), a public-private partnership that promotes road safety on and off the job. NETS members come from a range of industry sectors, and many are national and international leaders in motor vehicle safety management. NIOSH and the center benefit immeasurably from the
opportunity to interact with NETS and its members; we learn about emerging technologies and issues, research topics, and the challenges of achieving a balance between business goals and safety goals.

NIOSH’s collaborations with NETS, ASSE and partners in the oil and gas industry bring up a general point about the value of interacting with nongovernmental partners. It is clearly a two-way exchange. Our partners benefit from NIOSH research, technical assistance and educational materials. At the same time, by listening to our partners’ concerns, we can build a much more effective and relevant program that will meet the needs of employers and workers, and use our resources wisely.

PS: What are some goals or initiatives NCMVS seeks to accomplish in 2013?
Stephanie: We have several products planned for this coming year. These include a document on prevention of motor vehicle crashes among law enforcement officers; fact sheets for employers and parents on preventing motor vehicle crashes among young workers; an analysis of fatal work-related crashes that combines data from Department of Labor and DOT systems, and a technical document that will help truck manufacturers more effectively use NIOSH anthropometric data to design truck cabs that fit better and are safer for today's workers. The center is also working to increase the number and scope of research projects in motor vehicle safety across NIOSH.

PS: What are some words of advice for those working to effect change in their workplace motor vehicle safety programs?
Stephanie: Organizations of any size can and should take steps to manage motor vehicle safety for workers, promote safe operations, and reduce crashes and injuries. The need for motor vehicle safety management is not limited to those organizations that operate a fleet, or whose primary function is transport. The ANSI/ASSE Z15.1 standard and the ISO 39001 standard provide a basic framework, and many other resources are available to guide organizations in developing, implementing and monitoring a program.

PS: Any last words on NCMVS?
Stephanie: In many organizations, the operation of motor vehicles exacts a heavy toll in terms of worker injury, crash costs and liability. NCMVS is taking steps to build the knowledge base needed to help reduce this toll, and we look forward to working with partners to advance the safety of all workers who drive as a part of their job.

Stephanie Pratt is project coordinator of the NIOSH Center for Motor Vehicle Safety. Since 2010, she has played a major role in developing and promoting the center throughout NIOSH and through her involvement with external partners. Stephanie, who holds an M.A. in Applied Social Research and a Ph.D. in Political Science/Public Policy, has spent 20 years as an epidemiologist with NIOSH, publishing scientific papers, NIOSH publications, and policy documents on topics such as motor vehicle safety.