

Technical Report

American Society of Safety Engineers

Council on Practices and Standards

The Impact of Multi-Language Worksites on SH&E professionals

NOTICE: The American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE) Council on Practices and Standards (CoPS) produced this white paper and set of recommendations. CoPS provides technical insight and expertise to the ASSE's membership. CoPS also addresses the practice of the safety profession, its specific disciplines and the standards of practice that impact its members and the general public.

CoPS is structured to provide a balanced and sound assessment of matters related to the effectiveness and efficiency of the standards of practice in the Safety, Health and Environmental (SH&E) profession. CoPS consulted with many organizations, entities and governmental agencies to develop this white paper, but it has not been reviewed by any entity other than the ASSE. The contents of this white paper and its recommendations do not represent the views of any organization other than the ASSE. The mention of trade names, companies or commercial products does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement for their use.

The information and materials contained in this publication have been developed from sources believed to be reliable. However, the ASSE accepts no legal responsibility for the correctness or completeness of this material or its application to specific factual situations. By publication of this white paper, the ASSE does not ensure that adherence to these recommendations will protect the safety or health of any persons or preserve property.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	Page 3
Introduction, Mission, Purpose and Scope.....	Page 4
Summary Points.....	Page 5
Member Success Stories, Comments and Accepted Practices.....	Page 7
Legal Requirements.....	Page 15
NACOSH Report on Hispanic Worker Outreach.....	Page 16

ABSTRACT

The membership of the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE) practice specialties has continued to express significant interest in the issue of multi-language worksites.

The purpose of this white paper was to research the issues involved in multi-language worksites in the United States and to compile the results for review by the membership. The second purpose of the white paper was to identify some of the different methods that SH&E professionals use to address these issues. While the white paper is not all-encompassing, it does present a valid “Snapshot in Time” of this issue.

During 2004, the RM/I, Management and Construction Practice Specialties wrote a paper that addressed how Hispanic-speaking workers and SH&E professionals worked with communication-related issues and how this impacted the worksite. The results were published in several of the practice specialty newsletters, and member response was significant. However, one comment made repeatedly by members was that the ASSE should have approached the issue differently since it is much broader. Members pointed out that in the United States, SH&E professionals are now working with multi-language worksites, and it is no longer an issue of English and Spanish. In fact, the ASSE had one documented case of a SH&E professional who managed a program in which employees spoke eighteen (18) languages, and English was not the primary language of the worksite. Also, a member who manages safety and health for a fleet of commercial fishing vessels in the Bering Sea stated that multiple languages are an important safety and health concern because of the challenging work environments.

These comments generated much discussion within the different practice specialties. Therefore, it was decided to initiate a second round of “call for comments” to obtain additional information. To gather comments and insight, a solicitation was distributed to a significant number of SH&E professionals to capture anecdotal materials and comments for review. The format of the solicitation allowed the Council to analyze some of the different practices used in the profession as well as those used in American business.

The material obtained from this initiative is noteworthy because it indicates that the ASSE as a professional society may have underestimated the effects that multi-language worksites have on SH&E professionals and on the management systems for which they are responsible.

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

MISSION, PURPOSE, SCOPE

The methodology used by the Council was to distribute a “Call for Comments” on November 1, 2004 to each practice specialty member with an electronic mail message (e-mail) that asked for comments and materials about multi-language worksites. Our intent was not to distribute a traditional survey since we were more in need of written responses as opposed to simple “yes” or “no” answers. Below is the language in the e-mail sent to practice specialty members. Members who chose to participate could then click on an attached URL and submit their comments directly online:

Earlier this year, the staff at ASSE asked for comments and views about Spanish-speaking workers on construction and demolition sites. We received approximately 290 comments about the issue, which are greatly appreciated. This generated some additional interest in the comprehensive issue of multi-languages in the workplace and the best practices used to address this issue. To this end, if you have comments, papers, articles, best practices or policies that your organization has used to address this issue, it would be most appreciated if you sent them to us. We would like to use these materials as background for a paper about the multi-language issue. Materials and comments should be sent to the attention of Tim Fisher at TFisher@ASSE.Org. We would remove any identifying marks.

Our survey was for the total membership of the ASSE Practice Specialties who have a valid e-mail address registered with the ASSE. The thirteen practice specialties include:

- Academics Practice Specialty
- Construction Practice Specialty
- Consultants Practice Specialty
- Engineering Practice Specialty
- Environmental Practice Specialty
- Healthcare Practice Specialty
- Industrial Hygiene Practice Specialty
- International Practice Specialty
- Management Practice Specialty
- Mining Practice Specialty
- Public Sector Practice Specialty
- Risk Management/Insurance Practice Specialty
- Transportation Practice Specialty

The solicitation was sent to 8,200 members, and we received a total of 226 responses (2.8%). Out of this number, 139 written comments were submitted. The total comments exceeded over 100 pages in length. However, we believe the following points summarize members’ comments and insights about this issue:

SUMMARY POINTS

1. Due to its history and geographic location, the United States historically has not addressed multi-language worksites on an extensive basis as compared to other parts of the world (e.g. Central Europe). That is now changing.
2. SH&E professionals recognize that multi-language worksites are a growing challenge for the profession and that the challenge will only grow in complexity. The demographic data and information currently available would support this contention.
3. SH&E professionals are being called on to learn additional languages as the number of multi-language worksites and international responsibility increases.
4. A significant number of SH&E professionals in the United States also believe that companies should implement policies to encourage the use of English as the only language used on a worksite to enhance safety and health.
5. ASSE as a professional society should continue to distribute information and best practices that address this issue. In light of this, ASSE as a national organization should not take any position on the specific issue of which language should or should not be spoken in a workplace. That is a company policy-related issue, which should be developed and implemented by an organization's human resource professionals.
6. SH&E professionals as a good practice should begin planning for multi-language worksites in their organization, even if they currently do not have one. Such planning will assist SH&E professionals in preparing for this future challenge.
7. The ASSE is aware from its international members' anecdotal information that SH&E professionals in other countries are encouraged to learn other languages as a way to obtain and to maintain a competitive advantage in today's growing global marketplace.
8. SH&E professionals should learn additional languages as a way to market themselves in the future for professional growth and advancement.
9. Colleges and universities should prepare SH&E students to learn additional languages and to be prepared to work in multi-language working environments.
10. The issue of multi-language worksites has been viewed incorrectly as a matter of Spanish and English. The issue is much more complex, particularly in urban areas where there is a greater diversity of people and languages.
11. One of the key issues that impact SH&E professionals and multi-language worksites is literacy. Translating documents into several languages is not efficient or effective if the population in question is not literate in their own language.

12. Some companies have employed creative training and communication techniques to communicate with workers who speak a language other than English.
13. Some companies have implemented management systems that require workers to learn the language of the nation they are based in. This will become more important as the world economy continues to grow.
14. Member experience would indicate that the use of workers as translators for other employees can at times be effective and efficient for the company if it can create and manage processes to help ensure that the information is translated correctly and in an appropriate manner. The translation of complex SH&E information through a company employee to address hazards and exposures might not be appropriate under certain conditions and circumstances.
15. Language is only half of the equation facing SH&E professionals when addressing multi-language worksites. Cultural differences also play a crucial role and should not be underestimated. Translation may not always be effective or efficient if the cultural differences are not understood and taken into consideration.
16. Dialects vary from country to country and within countries. Translation of documents and communications for workers should take this into consideration to avoid miscommunication.
17. A quality workplace risk assessment is a critical step to take in addressing the issues of Multilanguage work sites.
18. The ASSE and the SH&E profession must be more proactive in multi-language worksites since this challenge will only continue to grow.

Member Success Stories, Comments and Accepted Practices

The stories, comments and accepted practices below were compiled from the responses received from ASSE members and other SH&E professionals who chose to participate. Our intent was not to prepare a data-based document, but instead to present a compendium of views from members regarding these issues:

+++

“I oversee SH&E activities at 13 facilities across the United States. The majority of non-English speaking employees are Spanish with some Asian employees on the West coast. So far, my greatest challenge has been finding a bilingual person who understands the topic I am trying to convey since they work in fields other than SH&E. However, when given time, I think I get the message across, and I verify any observations or questions I have with their supervisor.”

+++

“The language issue has become a real barrier in our business. Although we require that employees must be able to understand English, we are not confident that employees truly understand the messages. It is not just Spanish anymore. We purchased a company in Atlanta that is mostly from Vietnam. We use interpreters, but who knows how effective that is? We are a major billion-dollar corporation, and from an Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) department’s viewpoint, this is our biggest challenge today. Our goal of preventing accidents is harder to achieve because of the language issue.”

+++

“As a benefit, incoming professionals should see more incentive in become multi-lingual during school because of the opportunity for potential bonuses from employers who realize that the ability to create a multi-lingual safety program is a great asset that should be rewarded accordingly. Assuming that the employer is hiring employees from many different nationalities (i.e. Spanish-speaking Mexican Americans) to increase profit margins, they should be willing and able to compensate the safety professional for the added effort. As someone who speaks Spanish and French well, I see myself as being ahead of most others entering the field from the same point that I am (I am currently finishing my last year of my bachelor degree). However, this subject has not been brought up in any of my safety courses, and there is no language requirement for the bachelor degree. Maybe this problem in the United States should be addressed further by the few universities that have safety programs. These universities should also encourage incoming students to take courses early to gain an advantage. It may be necessary to look at how things are done in other countries.”

+++

“We have a significantly diverse workforce. In a facility of 650, we have 15 different languages with English as a second language. This presents a real challenge for safety training as well as standard work training. The ‘deer in headlights’ look seems to be present during our training. The

good news is that these workers still do well in the tasks they perform. Part of our solution was to use more visuals in the training process (versus English-language overheads). Additionally, we assigned a ‘mentor’ to assure that they understand the requirements of the job. We will continue to make efforts to meet the needs of a diverse workforce and to maintain safety, but we recognize the journey ahead of us.”

+++

“One possibility in multi-language workplaces is to use as many pictorial signs, warnings and posters as possible. We know from data and experience that this also helps with illiterate English-speaking workers.”

+++

“We operate worldwide using a dual-language approach (English and native tongue) in most places. In cases where multiple cultures and languages intersect, it is necessary to go with more of a multi-language approach. Most of the time English is used as the language of the business, but we still train and communicate in the native language(s).

This approach poses several problems with added cost being the most obvious. Perhaps less obvious is the continuous struggle to translate a language as rich, flexible and ‘precise’ as English into languages with fewer words or idiomatic concepts. Sometimes this leads to the use of the English ‘technical term’ blended into the syntax of the native language—not ideal, but an effective, workable compromise.”

+++

“Multiple language issues are becoming more and more prevalent in our work area primarily because of Hispanic work forces. Our approach to this is simple. We require all applicants to complete an application by themselves, and we test their craft skill level. All this is done in English. Applicants must be able to complete the application, test and interview in English. They are then processed and sent to the respective safety council for orientations, which are also in English. Our policy is that all applicants must be able to write, read and understand English as a condition of being employed and to provide a safe workplace where adequate communication of policies, procedures and work scopes can be communicated effectively.”

+++

“My company sponsors and conducts English as Second Language (ESL) classes onsite and recognizes employees who successfully complete the program. Prior to that training, employees are partnered with someone who speaks both the native language and English.”

+++

“Our company requires all personnel to speak in and to report in English while in the United States. This does not guarantee that all of our work force, primarily our contractor employees, understands

all of the information. Although English is also a fairly common international business language, we have standardized this for our international work as well. And even though we have this standard, we are seeing that international partners need us to add at least French and German to our programs to gain a better understanding. So now we need to have all of our programs translated to French, German and most likely Spanish (for certain sectors of the United States). The trick will be to make sure that the content is translated with its full meaning. A cost is involved.”

+++

“I currently work as a Loss Prevention Technical Director for a large insurance company. I am responsible for developing products, services and evaluation tools for our retail, wholesale and healthcare book of business. I have found the issue of safety and multiple languages in the workplace to be as prevalent in these industries as I have found in construction and manufacturing. Companies that have dealt with this effectively have established multi-lingual training and evaluation tools. The main components I see as essential to any multi-lingual training effort would include:

- A pre-established training and communication curriculum that takes into account not only language, but also cultural differences. The program needs to include staff who are capable of effectively communicating with non-English speaking employees.
- A commitment by management to see that sufficient resources are applied, not only to provide safety instruction (both mandated and based on exposure), but also to ensure that employees fully understand and can apply methods taught in the workplace.
- Systems in the workplace should support the training provided. For example, if we train an employee in Hazard Communication and the need to read and understand a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS), do we then ensure that employees have ready access to this information in the appropriate language?
- A means of open and ongoing communication to ensure that employers can effectively communicate with employees and that employees can communicate with supervision/management regarding safety issues.
- A conscious and visible effort by management to incorporate all of the diverse cultures into the organization.

Dealing effectively with multiple languages will continue to be an issue for all industries now and in the future. From a safety standpoint, ensuring that all employees possess the appropriate knowledge, skills and ability to understand and adhere to safety practices will be essential. Proactive employers will recognize and plan for this in a positive way versus dealing with language issues on an ‘as needed’ basis.”

+++

“This is not only a challenge for Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) professionals, but also for governments. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in California requires all safety postings to occur in seven languages.

Internally, it is a challenge in both emergency information and in training. We try to match non-English-speaking personnel with English-literate personnel in a buddy system to provide protection to the non-English speaker(s). It seems to work well, but the obvious exposure is when the English-literate individuals are absent or perhaps among the injured in an emergency.

For training, we try to ensure that the validating quiz questions are read to the non-English speaking personnel and that their responses indicated. OSHA has not yet asked us to prove that the non-English-speaking employees have retained their trained information.”

+++

“The issue in the South and Southeast is not just limited to Spanish-speaking workers or to any other nationality when it comes to safety in construction. The issue is functional illiteracy on the job either by cultural, environmental or regional influences.

Under the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), an employer is charged with providing a safe and healthful workplace for its employees. Like any task, objective or directive, a plan must be developed to ensure success. Those people who are included in this plan must be able to complete their individual tasks without flaw, and in the event of an unlikely emergency, without question in order to be successful.

The burden of training has traditionally fallen on the employer. Employers across the nation have met that challenge, and they are closely (sometimes costly) regulated by the CFR. So the questions are “Who is trainable for which job?” and “How far is an employer expected to go to train a new employee and to what expense without jeopardizing profit versus production versus overhead?” Let us not forget that most states in the South are “Right to Work” states. Employers carry an awesome burden when additional federal and local agencies get involved like the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Department of Labor (DOL), which mandate equality for all workers, again placing that burden squarely on the shoulders of the employer. It is impossible to comment on the question you have asked by isolating a single ethnic group without opening a Pandora’s box.

Hypothetically speaking, let us look at a task as simple as a fire watch. You train this individual by whatever means necessary (different language, take a test, hands-on, etc.) to a point considered to be competent, and you send this person to a job site. A fire occurs in their area. The fumes from this fire are toxic. The wind is blowing in a certain direction, and the loud speaker gives specific instructions as to where and how to evacuate, but the employee cannot understand the message, and the welder cannot hear it.

In another situation, signage gives specific instructions about where to go in the event of emergency, but the individual cannot read it. We provide a MSDS to our employees, but they cannot read it. Have we met our obligation in the intent of the Haz Com Standard?

This is why we pay such a large retainer to our attorneys. We try to work with everyone to the best of our ability to ensure that we meet the many laws and regulations, which govern our operations. Safety still remains the number one concern for our employees. If they are unable to perform the task or if they jeopardize the safety of others, we may choose not to hire them or to terminate their employment.”

+++

“It is a continuing challenge to get the messages of the HSE across a wide international audience. My experience mainly in the Middle East includes the Asian, Eastern European, Arabic and Far East language barriers. In one operation, there can be as many as 23 different languages. Although English is the accepted norm, the basic obligatory HSE courses have to be conducted in at least four different languages namely, English, Arabic, Malayam and Hindi. This approach is suggested to reach approximately 98% of the population. The training schemes do include confirmation sessions, but on some occasions, the normally written confirmation (test) has to be conducted verbally and sometimes with an additional interpreter.

I have also been involved in a four-year contract coaching Arabic businessmen in HSE fundamentals. This is part of a local community scheme, and it is conducted in English and Arabic. The scheme includes activity workshops, and it is designed with the blended method of training in mind.

With regard to the day-to-day HSE message in the workplace, there can never ever be an assumption that all workers fully understand what has been said or shown to them. To get the messages across and understood, we must include constant and consistent dialogue with or through others and ensure that the English message is not misconstrued or diluted along the way.

To finish, I have a typical example of what can go wrong:

A poster was produced in our operation. The poster was designed to remind personnel to wear the correct personal protective equipment (PPE). It showed two individuals in coveralls, helmets, gloves, etc. On one side of the poster, a rather stern-looking but very smart individual demonstrated the correct wearing of the PPE. The other side of the poster showed a smiling person who was not wearing his helmet, had dirty coveralls and generally looked unkempt. The idea was good, however, after some time, it appeared that the poster did not really have any desired affect.

When one of our operators looked further into the issue of PPE wear, he consulted with the Asian staff. He was amazed to find that the poster had been acknowledged by the operators but not in the right way or as expected. The smiling face of the scruffy worker drove the workers, and they also wanted to be like him—happy in their work! So what originally appeared to be a good English-driven idea was totally lost in translation. Of course, we had to withdraw the poster and go to Plan B. You cannot be too careful!”

+++

“Our work force (civil work, highway and bridge, heavy construction) is more than 70% Hispanic. Since 1994, we have had a safety training program, which requires that all employees have one hour per month of training. All foremen are required to attend the training with their crews. This program is conducted with the crews on location. We had special trailers built (8' x 30' Wells Cargo) to facilitate the training. These mobile facilities allow us to move around at the job sites. We can also work around production schedules and rotate crews so as to minimize the effect on production while having quality training time in a quality facility.

All classes and materials are bilingual (English and Spanish). The trainers are bilingual, and the classes are conducted in an interactive adult teaching format. This has enabled us to make tremendous gains in safety performance by getting the knowledge and understanding to the people at the front lines who do the work. It also opened up an enormous resource by tapping into the experience and knowledge of our people. We share ideas and discuss problems and potential solutions for safety and production. It has also given us an avenue for employee ownership in the safety process.”

+++

“As a trainer of safety in our facility, I agree with the growing problem of languages in the workplace. Our position is that if we cannot communicate to a level of understanding to protect the employee, then we cannot allow them to work for us. This does not mean that a non-English-speaking person has to be able to recite the OSHA standards, but that person must be able to demonstrate understanding in the form of verbal feedback to the trainer. I would say that our approach is not always the best for the facility’s production needs, but we have a commitment to protect the employee.

This communication barrier became a real eye-opener when ‘culture’ was also mixed in. For example, I was training our company’s research and development staff on building evacuation and fire safety. In attendance was a Chinese chemist with a Ph.D who spoke excellent English. After the session, he approached his supervisor with a question about fire alarm pull stations. The supervisor showed him where it was in his area. What happened next was totally unexpected because of what our culture teaches us when we are in grade school. He pulled it! We then realized that he did not understand pull stations.

The emerging ‘temporary workforce’ is interwoven in this problem as well. The temporary workforce is growing to meet the changing needs of production and service in America. This is aside from the fact that employers are not taking the time to properly train their own employees. These ‘temp workers’ may literally only work hours for you, and we all know that any manufacturing facility with a good safety program must spend at least two hours of orientation with a new employee just to cover the basics. How much time do you think these people are getting?

Truly in many industries in America, I have no doubt that the non-English-speaking and temporary workers are being shortchanged on safety in the workplace.”

+++

“As one of the main manufacturing companies in the Omaha, Nebraska area, we have great interest in the findings of this study. The following are some of the concerns and issues that we have. I am sure that most of these items will be addressed in this, as they are fairly common.

- Hiring/Screening Process—Are other companies establishing a minimum requirement for verbal and written communication (in English)? If so, what types of assessments are they using, and have they addressed the legal aspects of each?
- Written Communication—Have other companies translated safety documents into other languages? If so, what problems did they experience? How did they determine what documents needed translation? What impact did this have on cost and on the business overall? What administrative issues has this caused? Did the translation of documents end up encompassing all written communication?
- Verbal Communication—What have companies done to address issues of verbal communication? Has there been a push for bilingual managers? Do hourly employees act as translators/trainers?

We have great interest in this topic. Thank you to the ASSE for addressing a very critical issue.”

+++

“I have regularly audited safety activities at numerous oil and gas worksites in the international arena since 1994. These locations include Venezuela, Ecuador, Dubai, Qatar, China, Indonesia, Trinidad, Turkey, Algeria and Tunisia. The operations included onshore fields and plants, drilling rigs, offshore platforms, drill ships and a variety of construction projects onshore. Communication (within the workforce) is always an issue. However, language is only one component of culture.

There are many different issues besides language created in these environments. For a given site, the owner stipulates a language in the contract, but there is a predominate (common) language that is used. In my experience, the contractual language is English (otherwise I would not be there). The common language depends on the workforce. On a ship or drilling rig, there can be as many common languages as there are crewmembers. There is usually an effort to hire multilingual workers with one of the languages being English. However, there is no formal standard for determining language ability, and good work experience trumps poor language skills. What usually happens is that the management speaks English, and the workers do their best to understand. The better operations have a multilingual set of supervisors that translate and communicate the management's intent downward and convey the workers' issues upward.”

+++

“My perspective may be a little different from most. I am an American who has worked internationally for several years. At this moment, I have EHS responsibility for 30 locations in eight different language-speaking countries. The objective throughout the world is the same—to have a safe workplace. Everyone wants to go home at the end of the day in the same way that they arrived. In order to accomplish this objective, we need to be able to communicate.

The non-English-speaking employees in the United States would face the same communications issues if they were to work in any other country of the world. They would have their own language, the language of the country that they work and live in, and English. Most corporations operating in Europe have the same problem as we have here with this issue. Since the European Union (EU) opened the doors for citizens from all countries to move to countries with better opportunities, English has become the foundation for most communications. Considering this as a primary issue, most EU countries and employers in those countries are subsidizing the cost of the 'English' education of employees. Many are also assisting with the cost of learning the language of the country.

Maybe American companies and non-English speaking employees could come to this kind of understanding. The employers and government could promote ESL in a more effective way as well as the training of American employees in the languages spoken at the sites.”

+++

“Due to the shortage of the healthcare professionals, we hire healthcare professionals from all over the world who are of different cultures, training, medical practice, language, etc. As our business operates 24/7, and the physicians are not available onsite at all times, nursing staff must receive verbal or telephone orders. The chance of medical error increases when there are different accents. Our national accreditation standard requires the nursing staff to repeat back and spell out words at times to verify the accuracy of orders, especially for medication administration. This practice has reduced medical errors significantly. Likewise, the healthcare industry is famous for using abbreviations and acronyms. The industry has also developed a national list of non-approved abbreviations. All of these are required as training during orientation and on an ongoing basis.”

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS **IMPACT FOR SH&E PROFESSIONALS**

Many of the SH&E professionals who commented on the issue of multiple languages in the workplace pointed out that in order to create safer and healthier workplaces, their companies and organizations have implemented English-only policies. Due to these comments, we thought it would be useful to include some of the general findings and guidance we have about these issues.

Research conducted during the development of this paper indicated that English-only policies could be enforced under the following conditions:

- The policy is only effective only during certain periods of the workday.
- It is job-related and a business necessity.

It is interesting to note that courts have found that acceptable business necessities do include enhancing workplace safety and health. However, even in the case of safety and health, it is important to avoid blanket policies simply because they might be easier to implement and enforce. If a company or organization is going to implement English-only policies, then it is critical for the SH&E professional to play a role in identifying these necessities (e.g. Should the organization require that all employees speak English while working on an assembly line for safety reasons?).

The EEOC has addressed much of the debate surrounding this issue and its impact on occupational safety and health. It should be noted that while the courts can and have given the EEOC some deference, they are not required to follow the commission's guidance. In fact, the courts can disregard the EEOC. A good example of that is when the Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals rejected the EEOC guidelines and upheld an English-only rule in the case of Garcia versus Spunsteak Company. The factory instituted an English-only rule in the workplace after a series of different issues. Part of the policy's purpose was to enhance worker safety and product quality. Bilingual workers in their suit claimed that this policy violated their rights. The courts eventually upheld the language policy.

Our research also indicated that if your organization is considering implementing an English-only policy, it should be based on business necessities and should only apply for work situation. If you as an SH&E professional are considering recommending such a policy, a thorough review of appropriate legal counsel must be conducted.

NACOSH Hispanic Outreach Working Group Report

Much of the work from Emory Knowles has involved chairing a working group on the National Advisory Committee on Occupational Safety and Health (NACOSH) on Hispanic worker outreach. The following is a summary of some of the recommendations presented to OSHA by a NACOSH working group on Hispanic worker outreach. The recommendations were proposed to address the issue of multiple languages in the workplace and its impact on safety, health and environmental management.

General Considerations

In July 2004, OSHA launched the new public Hispanic Employees and Workers Website. The website features outreach activities, best practices, bulletins, English-Spanish and Spanish-English dictionaries, public service announcements, a toll-free telephone number and e-Tools in Spanish (e.g. construction and sewing).

Various groups in Oregon have used materials from OSHA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). It was noted that dialects must be evaluated when translating, and these groups translated documents to fit Hispanic workers' dialects. Important difficulties in translation relate to reading level and differences in regional colloquial language. For this reason, the OSHA website dictionaries, published by the OSHA Hispanic Task Force, were developed to establish a common terminology.

OSHA is forming a translation work group from different OSHA area offices. The work group will prioritize publications for translation. OSHA's Office of Communications will do the actual translations. The translations are to be targeted to a third-grade audience. The goal is to have less text and more visuals, including pictograms and bulleted points. The publications are circulated for review within the agency and alliance partners. Until this point, however, these reviews are of the English documents. OSHA does use approved contractors for translation. A new teen worker poster has been completed and is now being translated into Spanish.

In 2004, OSHA issued a letter of agreement with the Mexican embassy to translate materials into a simpler format with more pictograms. Work has been completed on topics in construction, landscaping, meatpacking and employee rights. The Mexican government will take English documents and translate them for Mexican workers in the United States and in Mexico.

NIOSH has documented the following activities:

1. The agency has a Spanish language website.
2. Employers and employees can telephone the toll-free NIOSH number and speak to a Spanish-speaking operator or to leave a message during off-hours.
3. Work is underway to improve access to Health Hazard Evaluation (HHE) for Spanish speakers. The agency hopes to hire bilingual industrial hygienists and has at least one Spanish-speaking medical officer.

4. The latest National Agricultural Worker Survey has been completed, which provides extensive demographic and other information about Hispanic and other farm workers.
5. NIOSH is exploring the development of telenovelas or incorporating occupational safety and health messages into these popular, primetime “soap operas” to improve outreach.
6. National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA) programs continue and five-year programs include initiatives to develop better training programs for immigrant workers to improve risk perception and communication.
7. Some Harwood grants are being used to evaluate the effectiveness of various types of occupational safety education approaches and materials. The representatives commented that they also perform translations targeted to the needs of specific populations. These grants may no longer be available following the recent news releases on the 2005 OSHA budget.

The Health Hazard Evaluation (HHE) is translated into Spanish when needed. It was also noted that some workers prefer their health and safety information to come from their employers and not from government or community groups. Yet, as mentioned earlier, many experts in the Hispanic worker areas indicate that community groups are an important focal point. This implies that SH&E professionals will need to conduct some research before choosing an approach.

The following recommendations were submitted to the entire NACOSH committee for review and presentation to OSHA and NIOSH:

1. Continue the investigation into Hispanic worker outreach issues by the working group of NACOSH.
2. Both OSHA and NIOSH should use more visuals, especially in the online dictionary and in compliance assistance documents.
3. OSHA and NIOSH should provide links on their websites to state plan websites where a basic work has been done and some best practices have been highlighted (e.g. Oregon and Florida).
4. OSHA should verify that all critical publications on the OSHA website have Spanish translations.
5. For future summits and other conferences, both agencies should assure the publication of proceedings on agency websites.
6. The working group encourages NIOSH to continue pursuing telenovelas to spread the message of worker safety. It was also suggested that OSHA and NIOSH work together to make more resources available for such activities. (**Note:** Other discussions at the December 8, 2004 NACOSH meeting relative to the use of telenovelas indicated that male worker populations were not likely to be reached via that venue. The use of messages during sports programs, such as soccer, boxing, etc. may reach a much wider male worker audience. NIOSH should further investigate this).
7. Funding for OSHA/NIOSH tuberculosis outreach and education was recommended.
8. The agencies should renew the NORA commitment to special populations and continue programs on training and risk communication.
9. Both OSHA and NIOSH should field-test in targeted communities all translated documents to ensure that workers are receiving the message. The Harwood grants should aid this effort to ensure that workers understand messages from a variety of communities.

10. Environmental justice projects have forged strong community ties. The agencies should take advantage of these ties to promote worker safety and health messages and to identify new partners.
11. Each of the 49 Mexican consulates (each having a Hispanic coordinator) should be included by both agencies in the field-testing of documents.
12. OSHA and NIOSH should continue to share research and informal findings about how best to reach workers.
13. Both agencies should evaluate their website effectiveness in getting messages to Hispanic and Latino workers and to ascertain if they are effective in getting messages to employers. (It was noted that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Department of Labor Compliance Assistance are attempting to obtain clearance for the agencies to conduct surveys.)
14. The NIOSH and OSHA websites should continue to be linked and to share resources as much as possible.
15. Consideration should be given to appointing a NIOSH representative as a liaison on the OSHA Hispanic Task Force so that agency actions are not duplicated and that the best use of actions are ensured.