Report from the 2012 Regional Good Jobs Green Jobs Conferences: Focus on Worker Health and Safety Training
It is vital, now, that we integrate worker safety and health concerns into green manufacturing, green construction and green energy. Most importantly: We must push worker health and safety as a critical, necessary, and recognized element of green design, green lifecycle analysis and green contracts.

—DAVID MICHAELS, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health
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Focus on Worker Health and Safety Training

PART ONE:

Worker Deaths and Injuries Challenge the Green Jobs Movement

The audience was completely silent as Jay Vicory described the death of a young worker at a biofuel facility. The worker had died while cleaning the inside of an empty railroad tank car that had contained biodiesel fuel. This ‘green’ product is made by reacting vegetable oils and animal fat with alcohol to create Fatty Acid Methyl Ester (FAME) or biodiesel. Inside the oxygen-starved fume-filled tank, the worker collapsed as his supervisor watched from above. Vicory, the San Diego Area Director for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s Region 9, had investigated this death and as his handheld video of the attempted rescue played on the screen, he described the lack of a confined space rescue plan at the site, the arrival of emergency responders unfamiliar with the plant, and the confusion, risks and delays that developed.

The audience was attending a workshop that was part of the Western Regional Good Jobs Green Jobs Conference sponsored by the Blue Green Alliance. In attendance were labor and environmental representatives, contractor and manufacturer personnel, and at this session on making green jobs safe jobs, there were a number of young workers from the Minority Worker Training Program of UCLA Labor Occupational Safety and Health. Their concern was personal and direct: this man should have never died, he should have never been sent into that tank, he should have had training, the company should have been prepared; and without our training, it could have been one of us.

Afterwards these students spoke of their personal goals. They were preparing to enter what they saw as a career path - environmental remediation and associated employment in construction and manufacturing. They were particularly interested in possible employment in this new green sector. But they also saw themselves as people of color from neighborhoods heavily impacted by environmental hazards including chemical facilities. They had seen green jobs as a path forward for themselves and their communities. Vicory’s talk made them pause. They had heard of ‘green’ chemical companies and they asked: is this what it was really like inside the company fence? This death was simply wrong; as was the plight of their neighborhoods. Was green really a path to take or just another buzzword?
The Blue Green Alliance (BGA) links 12 of this country’s largest unions and environmental organizations - representing 14 million members and supporters. BGA advocates the growth in the number and quality of jobs in a green economy that includes renewable energy, energy efficiency, the substitution of safer, cleaner chemicals, modern transportation systems and advanced vehicle technology, domestic manufacturing, high-speed Internet and a smart, efficient electrical grid, green schools and other public buildings, improving our nation’s water infrastructure, recycling, and sustainable agriculture.

Eight areas of green job hazards that have been raised by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA):
- Wind Energy
- Solar Energy
- Geo-Thermal Energy
- Biofuels
- Recycling
- Green Roofs
- Hydrogen Fuel Cells
- Weather Insulating and Sealing

These points of emphasis dovetail with the eight areas of green job hazards that have been raised by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA): Wind Energy, Solar Energy, Geo-Thermal Energy, Biofuels, Recycling, Green Roofs, Hydrogen Fuel Cells, Weather Insulating and Sealing.

Thus it was fitting that OSHA representatives in partnership with the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences Worker Education and Training Program (NIEHS WETP) participated in the four 2012 regional Good Jobs Green Jobs conferences - Atlanta, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Detroit. OSHA and NIEHS WETP had teamed together at the previous 2011 and 2010 national BGA conferences and this built upon that work. The goal was to help the practitioners (labor representatives and workers, BGA and other environmental staff members, green job developers and employers, students and trainers) attending these conferences understand safety and health issues in green jobs and to find resources for addressing these same issues.

NIEHS WETP provides funding for a national network of non-profit occupational safety and health training organizations focused on the cleanup of hazardous materials and waste. Over 140,000 workers annually are trained through this network. In addition, NIEHS WETP funds a Minority Worker Training Program that trains citizens living in communities impacted by abandoned hazardous waste sites in environmental remediation and construction. Because of its direct positive impact on the environment, NIEHS WETP and its 20 primary grantees had long viewed their work as ‘green’ work.

NIEHS WETP participation in all four of the conferences was predicated on three concepts. First, worrisome rates of death, illness and injury were a direct challenge to the validity of a green jobs movement. Can a building be called ‘green’ if workers die building or maintaining it? Second, by building communication on these challenges within the green jobs movement, solutions could be found and partnerships could be built to implement these solutions. This process had begun at the 2010 and 2011 conferences. Third, green jobs were playing an important role in addressing environmental problems in communities of color; and the Minority Worker Training Program in particular was a highly successful model that could and should be implemented elsewhere. NIEHS WETP organized - along with its BGA, federal agency, grantee and community partners - sessions at each of the conferences to highlight these concepts: a technical session on green job hazards; an informal ‘sharing’ session to highlight concerns and successes; and an environmental justice session to underscore green jobs as a path forward.
PART TWO:

Green or Not: Safety Is the Law

Entitled “Green or Not: Safety Is the Law” the technical session consisted of OSHA and NIEHS WETP representatives along with an NIEHS WETP grantee. As the session description explained: “Green jobs are not always safe jobs, and many hazards associated with green jobs are not unique. They can be the typical workplace hazards - including fall, lockout/tagout and confined space hazards - or new challenges as workers and managers confront new processes and new materials. Yet employers are required to protect workers from workplace hazards and follow OSHA requirements, whether ‘green or not.’ This panel will discuss typical green job hazards in different industries and discuss OSHA requirements that apply to these hazards. The panelists will also discuss safety and health-training programs that can help workers and employers address these requirements.”

In Atlanta, Benjamin Ross, Assistant Administrator for Enforcement, OSHA Region 4, was joined by Kenny Oldfield, Program Director, Workplace Safety Training Program, Alabama Fire College, an NIEHS WETP awardee, on the panel which was moderated by Ted Outwater, Public Health Educator/Program Administrator, NIEHS WETP. Mr. Outwater organized and moderated all four of the regional sessions.

In Los Angeles, as noted above, Jay M. Vicory, San Diego Area Director OSHA Region 9 was joined by NIEHS WETP awardee William Hatch, Hazardous Waste/Haz Mat Project Director, ULCA-Labor Occupational Safety and Health.

In Philadelphia, Sanji Kanth, PE, Safety Engineer, Office of General Industry Enforcement; Directorate of Enforcement Programs, OSHA presented along with NIEHS WETP awardee Dr. Mitchel A. Rosen, Director, Office of Public Health Practice, University
of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey - School of Public Health.

In Detroit, presentations were made by Bill Donovan, Assistant Regional Administrator for Enforcement Programs OSHA Region 5; Dan Steffen, Compliance Officer and Leader Wind Turbine Response Team, OSHA Region 5; and NIEHS WETP awardee Lula Odom, Senior Trainer, International Chemical Workers Union Center for Worker Education and Training.

Each session contained a core of OSHA information, originally developed by Kanth, which was then given a regional focus by the presenter. For example, in Detroit, Donovan and Steffen provided insights into the growing wind turbine industry in Region 5 including OSHA’s partnership with the American Wind Energy Association - the national trade association of America’s wind industry, with more than 2,500 member companies. In Atlanta, Ross discussed cases specific to Region 4 where many traditional hazards were new to many workers moving into fast-growing green industries. Also featured prominently were OSHA’s online web-based resources for employers and workers.

In a similar manner, NIEHS WETP grantees provided information specific to their particular region. For example, Oldfield discussed classes he was conducting on protecting first responders to accidents involving alternative fuel vehicles and how hazards and the response vary with various fuels: ethanol, natural gas, hybrid and electric, propane, and hydrogen fuel cell. In Los Angeles, Hatch previewed the computer-based training tool on safety and health issues in green building retrofitting developed by UCLA-LOSH.

PART THREE:

Input from the Sharing Sessions

While the OSHA sessions highlighted specific green job safety and health challenges and the work of two federal agencies, the sharing sessions demonstrated a much broader coalition of concern and activity. Hosted by BGA and NIEHS WETP at three of the conferences, these provided an opportunity to examine a range of local, regional and national initiatives.

In Atlanta, Laroya Miller, EPA Region 4, discussed regional green workforce training and how the “Green Jobs Framework for Communities” they are developing will document green job internship and apprenticeship opportunities. She also discussed the City of Atlanta being one of 10 cities that are a part of the Emerald Cities Collaborative - a national network of businesses, unions, government representatives, community organizations, research and technical assistance providers, development intermediaries, and social justice advocates, united around the goal of advancing a sustainable environment while creating economic opportunities.

In Detroit, Molly Dowling, OAI, Inc. described their Chicago Green Healthy Homes project; how they track worker safety on home retrofitting and window replacement jobs; and their promotion of worker safety in the manufacturing of wind and solar power components.

NIOSH, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, was represented at two sessions. In Philadelphia, Christine Branch, Principal Associate Director, NIOSH, discussed their ongoing effort along with BGA and the building trades to convince the US Green Building Council to include worker safety and health as a part of the LEED certification criteria. In Detroit, Kenneth Fent, NIOSH Industrial
Hygienist, described the NIOSH Health Hazard Evaluation Program. This service offers a worksite investigation in response to a request from employees, employers, or unions to determine whether harmful exposures, processes, or conditions exist or cause injuries and illnesses. It involves employees and management throughout the process.

Rev. Vernell Cutter representing the Savannah Worker Education and Job Training Program discussed the successful partnerships they have developed in Georgia with local, state, and federal agencies including the courts. He also discussed the aspirations of his trainees, their desire to own their own business someday; and how, in an area with very high local unemployment, small business start-up training might not be unrealistic.

At several of the sessions, Anna Fendley, United Steelworkers, and Charlotte Brody, BGA, described their work developing a new computer application called CHEMHA T. CHEMHA T consolidates information about the dangers of chemical exposures into one tool. With this tool, workers will have one comprehensive source for identifying chemical hazards at work, replacing up to a dozen separate web sources.

In Philadelphia, Jeff Barnet, Environmental Protection Agency Region 3, described the EPA Brownfields Job Training Grants Program. The program offers competitive grants up to $200,000 to eligible government entities, tribes, and non-profit organizations to train residents living in communities with brownfields. Applicants are considered according to the partnerships that will be involved, the maturity of the relationships they have with employer networks, the degree of need exemplified, their ability to acquire life skills training funds elsewhere, and the curriculum intended for the training.

These examples of the sharing session discussions point to a number of lessons-learned: the obvious need for partnerships and networking, the importance of sharing information and resources, and the importance of an ongoing effort to keep safe jobs on the green job agenda.
PART FOUR:

Partnerships for Green Jobs and Environmental Justice

If green jobs are about building a cleaner sustainable environment, then the challenge and opportunity of environmental justice must be faced by the green jobs movement. It is here that the issues of a safe and healthy workplace in a healthy community are joined. To emphasize this, NIEHS WETP sponsored two sessions entitled “Forgotten Communities: Environmental Justice and Building a Green Society”. These sessions made the point that the Good Jobs, Green Jobs movement is underappreciated as a positive method for addressing the ongoing legacy of environmental injustice in communities of color. The remediation of contaminated sites in these communities has always been a green issue, yet it has rarely been a priority. The sessions provided participants with an understanding of how green principles are being incorporated into the recovery of impacted communities in Atlanta, Savannah and New Orleans, Philadelphia, New York and New Jersey. In addition, a similar session “Environmental Justice in Building a Green Society” was held in Detroit and described work in Chicago and Detroit.

In Atlanta, Sharon Beard, Program Administrator, NIEHS WETP, moderated this session which included presentations by Dr. Beverly Wright, Director, Deep South Center for Environmental Justice; Dr. Ebony Turner, Program Coordinator, Deep South Center for Environmental Justice; the Reverend Vernell Cutter, Savannah Worker Education and Job Training Program (SWEJTP).
Dr. Wright provided an environmental overview for the session centered on the impact that climate change will have on the Gulf region. This included storm intensification and the vulnerability of low-income and minority populations. She also discussed the disproportionate impact of the BP Oil Spill on these same people as an example of the need for a transition to a green economy.

Dr. Turner built upon this by describing the role that their training program played in addressing environmental justice issues where certification in the areas of asbestos and lead abatement, hazardous waste cleanup, mold remediation, and weatherization lead to both employment and healthier communities.

Reverend Cutter described Savannah Georgia where SWEJTP faced a 25% unemployment rate. SWEJTP serves as the local career training and job placement program for green jobs. In addition to technical courses, their approach involves recognition of the unique characteristics of each individual and counseling and mentoring support as unemployed workers transition into regular work schedules. He also stressed the role partnerships played in the success of his organization and trainees. He viewed the creation of additional small business opportunities as an essential part of addressing environmental justice issues within Savannah.

In Detroit, Mollie Dowling, Director, OAI Chicago Southland, an NIEHS WETP awardee, presented and moderated the panel that included Mary Freeman of Southwest Housing Solutions, Detroit, MI; Elise Zelechowski, The ReBuilding Exchange, Delta Institute, Chicago, IL; and Sandra Yu, Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice, Detroit, MI. The session focused on three successful approaches to building a local green economy while addressing issues of poverty, workforce development, and environmental justice.

Detroit GreenWorks Solutions, explained Ms. Freeman, is a job training and placement program based on the concept that green training was a pathway to many jobs. Classes ranged from asbestos and lead remediation through weatherization and landscaping to life skills and computer use. As in other model programs, a multitude of partnerships with employers resulted in high placement rates.

Ms. Freeman also noted the social benefits to the community provided by graduates of the program. Examples included weatherizing work for friends and family, beautifying yards and neighborhoods, developing community gardens, and individual entrepreneurial activities.

Elise Zelechowski described the highly successful ReBuilding Exchange – a social enterprise working to transform the waste economy, create jobs and promote healthy communities. Using a process of building deconstruction, the careful dismantling of a building in order to salvage components for reuse and recycling, the ReBuilding Exchange is able to provide jobs in the collection, sales and warehousing of saved materials. This results in economic, environmental and social benefits for the community including tax deductions for building owners, reduced landfill costs for contractors, neighborhood support, and local jobs.

Sandra Yu explained that Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice was formed to address the disproportionate burdens faced by people of color and low-income residents in environmentally distressed communities. Once again, a carefully designed and implemented program of technical and life skill training had resulted employment directly related to building cleaner, healthier neighborhoods.
In Philadelphia, Ted Outwater moderated the session which included Katherine Strickle, Assistant Director of Career Services, STRIVE/New York; Kelly A. Watts, Program Manager, The Osborne Association, Green Career Center; Mitch Rosen, Director, Office of Public Health Practice, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, School of Public Health; and Michael Johnson-Chase, Director, Green Workforce Training Program, Solar One. Ms. Strickle talked about STRIVE’s program and its 30 year history, and its work supporting brownfield development through job training. Kelly Watts described the Green Career Center at the Osborne Association. Osborne has developed a new social enterprise called “Spring Into Action”, which focuses on small business development incubation for Osborne graduates. Mitch Rosen discussed a systems approach to training and employment which, as with other programs, combined training in life skills, environmental justice, construction, green jobs, and environmental remediation. Johnson-Chase elaborated on the work of Solar One, a partner of STRIVE and The Osborne Association, in focusing on training in building energy efficiency and performance, green building operations and maintenance, and renewable energy including solar panel installation. Solar One also provides training in green construction including basic green carpentry, electrical and plumbing work.

Through informal discussion and through the sharing sessions, a number of other concerns and success stories were raised. In Los Angeles, Alonzo Emery, Director, Minority Worker Training Program, Center for Construction Research and Training- CPWR, East Palo Alto CA; and Samantha Quintero, MWTP Coordinator for the Western Region Universities Consortium, UCLA-LOSH talked about the success they had in the use of Project Labor Agreements, model ordinances, and partnerships with local government and financial and commercial businesses. In Philadelphia, John Devlin, Utility Workers Union of America, raised a number of issues of concern to his members including the unknowns of the natural gas fracking process. Thomas Held, MetaMedia Training International, discussed the work his company was doing on green training technology development for the Operative Plasters and Cement Masons Union. Mark Catlin, Service Employees International Union, discussed the lack of understanding about worker health and safety in hospital settings particularly among the environmental service teams.

In Atlanta, Don Ellenberger, CPWR - Center for Construction Research and Training, reviewed their work with NIOSH on including safety and health factors in LEED ratings; and Gary Harris, Center for Sustainable Communities, gave a boots-on-the-ground review of the hazards involved in residential weatherization projects. In Detroit, Nella Davis-Ray, Director, Consultation Education & Training Division, Michigan Occupational Safety & Health Administration, explained their outreach program to manufacturing, community, renewable energy, and recycling groups to convey their strategic plan and the emphasis they are placing on fall safety. Donele Wilkins, Director, The Green Door Initiative, and her associates Jessica Patton and Nate Moore along with Leon Petty, owner, Go Green Contracting, provided insights into weatherization, demolition and decontamination/deconstruction.

In sum, these discussions demonstrated that well-designed training programs linked to green jobs and focused on environmentally damaged communities are being effective in resolving issues of environmental justice. Safety and health training is central to this effort as are the partnerships that link the individual graduate, the community, and the employer.

Focus on Worker Health and Safety Training
PART FIVE:

What Are Our Next Steps

While NIEHS WETP cannot speak for those who have participated in the sessions described above, there are a number of actions that NIEHS WETP will take or is considering.

- Participation in the Good Jobs Green Jobs conferences documented success and problems in making green jobs safe jobs. This is of great value and NIEHS WETP will continue its participation in the next conference including providing travel support to selected community and other representatives.

- With its partners, NIEHS WETP proposes that a plenary session on safety and health challenges be organized and proposed for the next national conference.

- As resources allow, NIEHS WETP will incorporate green job initiatives and best practices into its webpages and newsbriefs.

- NIEHS WETP will begin a process of consulting with business and trade groups such as the wind power association on their training needs.

- NIEHS WETP will discuss with its Department of Energy partners the incorporation of green job principles into various training programs.

- NIEHS WETP will explore packaging a set of safety and health curricula for various green jobs.

- NIEHS WETP will seek to identify an introduction to starting a small business module that could be utilized by MWTP awardees.

NIEHS WETP thanks those who have participated in the 2012 Good Jobs Green Jobs conferences. The effort was substantial; OSHA in particular should be recognized for the important role they played at each conference in getting and keeping worker safety and health on the green agenda.

For more information or to comment on this report, contact Ted Outwater, NIEHS, at outwater@niehs.nih.gov.