

Workplace Health Without Borders Dedicated To Preventing Occupational Disease Worldwide

Dedication to the prevention of occupational disease around the world has motivated occupational hygienists and other occupational health professionals to form the non-profit Workplace Health Without Borders (WHWB). “Even occupational health professionals may be surprised to learn that occupational illness and injury kill more people than causes that get a lot more attention, like armed conflict and HIV/AIDS,” says David Zalk, a WHWB Board member and past President of the International Occupational Hygiene Association (IOHA). “With occupational health hazards responsible for 2 million deaths and another 160 million illnesses annually, there is a tremendous need that WHWB wants to help fill.”

Only 13 countries offer professional certification in occupational hygiene, and it has been estimated that another 55,000 certified hygienists would be needed worldwide to offer the level of service available in those 13 countries. WHWB members are willing to volunteer their knowledge and services to help fill this gap.

Registered as a charity in Canada, WHWB has an international membership including members in the UK. WHWB encourages members to form chapters in other regions, and currently chapters are forming in the US, Australia and Africa. WHWB’s mission is to engage the occupational health professions in ensuring that workers and employers throughout the world have the knowledge and

technical means to prevent work-related disease. Its members include occupational hygienists, physicians and other health and safety experts who volunteer their time to offer training, mentoring and technical assistance to help develop capacity and knowledge to prevent occupational disease in areas that lack resources and expertise.

WHWB is partnering with the University of Toronto on a project to address high silica exposure among agate workers in Gujarat, India. The project, which received a grant from Canada’s Grand Challenges program, also involves the People’s Training and Research

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Centre (PTRC), a community organization in Gujarat. “Technical solutions commonly applied in the developed world may be very difficult to implement, due to lack of resources, energy and water,” explains Om Malik, a WHWB Board and project team member. “Another serious issue, common in many countries, is that children as well as adults are exposed to high levels of hazards like silica, because they work as child labourers, or their parents work at home or bring the children to



work because there is no school or childcare.” A number of WHWB’s projects involve silica exposure. Other examples include WHWB’s work with Jeevan Rekha Parishad (JRP) in Orissa, India, which works to prevent silica exposure in the stonecrushing industry. WHWB is also working with groups in Pakistan, Nepal and Tanzania to address exposure to silica and other hazards in brick making plants, which employ many child labourers. In relation to the widespread interest in silica, WHWB volunteers are writing a silica module to be offered through the Occupational Hygiene Training Association (OHTA).

WHWB is a recognized OHTA training provider, and plans to offer OHTA courses in areas where participants cannot pay the full fee for courses offered by private providers. Through the WHWB mentoring program, members mentor new occupational health professionals in developing countries through regular online meetings. WHWB accepts donations of occupational hygiene equipment, and has provided equipment or facilitated direct donations to groups that need it.

WHWB meets monthly by teleconference, and welcomes all those who share our goals to join our network and attend our meetings. We need more volunteer help to build the organization and also welcome financial and in-kind donations to support our services. WHWB would welcome a UK chapter if there is interest in forming one.

For more information, please visit our website,

www.whwb.org,

see our video <https://vimeo.com/74343804>

or email info@whwb.org

