

*Project

SE.N.S.O.R.

News

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Decimation of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

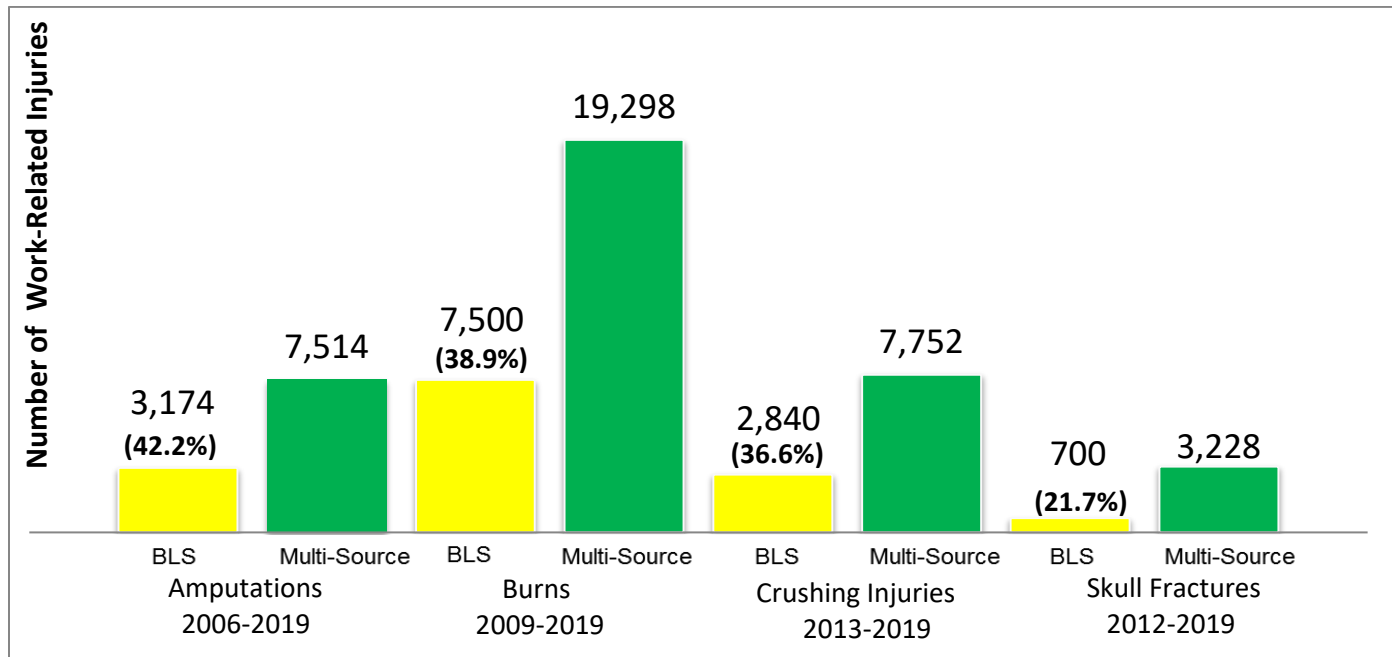
NIOSH was created in 1970 as the research component of the OSHA act. Its activity includes: 1) Developing recommended workplace exposure limits (RELs); 2) Certifying respirators; 3) Certifying physicians to classify chest radiographs for pneumoconiosis (B readers); 4) Funding education/training of future occupational health professionals (Educational Research Centers (ERCs)); 5) Conducting Health Hazard Evaluations (HHEs); 6) Conducting and funding research; and 7) Funding occupational injury and illness surveillance programs. On April 1, all the staff related to the above activities were put on administrative leave with termination of their jobs on June 2 or July 2. It is presumed that all extramural awards to academic researchers, states and centers will be terminated when current awards end June 30 or September 30.

The loss of NIOSH will have a major impact in Michigan. The University of Michigan Educational Research Center will close. See the YouTube video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lcs8oeXHsJ0>) created by Rick Neitzel, PhD, Professor of Environmental Health Sciences and Director of the University of Michigan ERC.

At Michigan State University the tracking system for work-related injuries and illnesses will be severely curtailed unless a new source of funds can be identified. The program at MSU is based on recommendations from two reports from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NAS). These reports discussed the importance of state-based surveillance activity to document the true magnitude of work-related injuries and illnesses and prioritize interventions to reduce morbidity and mortality. The most recent report was released in 2018; A Smarter National Surveillance System for Occupational Safety and Health in the 21st Century (www.nap.edu/24835). The annual official compilation of occupational injuries and illnesses in the United States put out by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimates approximately 2.6 million non-fatal injuries and 5,300 fatal injuries each year. The annual economic and medical cost of work-related injuries and illnesses is greater than the annual cost of cancer. Data from state-based surveillance systems such as Michigan show that the official statistics from the BLS underestimate the number of non-fatal injuries by 60-80% and that the BLS data is even worse for work-related illnesses, particularly chronic diseases such as work-related lung disease and cancer. Figure 1 shows data from Michigan, which document how state-based surveillance provides a more accurate count of the burden of work-related injuries.

For 37 years, Michigan State University (MSU) has worked with the state health department and the state OSHA plan to administer Michigan's Multi-source Occupational Injury and Illness Surveillance Program. Work done by the program can be found on the MSU website (www.oem.msu.edu). This work is documented in annual reports, data fact sheets, hazard alerts, quarterly newsletters, and other educational material.

Figure 1. Comparison of Multi-Source Data Surveillance in Michigan vs. the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Employer Based Survey for Work-Related Amputations, Burns, Crushing Injuries and Skull Fractures.



Examples of three success stories based on the Michigan state-based surveillance system can be found on the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists website:

- Fifty percent reduction in the use of silica and substitution with safer alternative abrasive materials by employers doing abrasive blasting in Michigan.
https://www.cste.org/resource/resmgr/2015billets/Michigan_OH_Success_Story_20.pdf
- Documentation that employers are reporting only 44% of serious work-related injuries that require hospitalizations.
https://www.cste.org/resource/resmgr/OH_Success_Story_Michigan_Fi.pdf
- Documentation of fatalities from the use of methylene chloride that led to its removal from paint stripping products.
https://www.cste.org/resource/resmgr/Occupational_Health_Success_Stories/MI_bathtub_refinisher.pdf

The program at MSU has published multiple articles on work-related lung disease. Five examples are:

- Rosenman KD, Millerick-May M, Reilly MJ, et al. Swimming Facilities & Work-Related Asthma. J Asthma 2015; 52: 52-58.
- Reilly MJ, Timmer SJ, Rosenman KD. The Burden of Silicosis in Michigan, 1988-2016. Annals Am Thoracic Society 2018; 15: 1404-1410.

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- Reilly MJ, Wang L, Rosenman KD. The Burden of Work-Related Asthma in Michigan, 1988-2018. *Annals Am Thoracic Soc* 2020; 17: 284-292.
 - Rosenman KD, Reilly MJ, Pechter E, et al. Cleaning Products and Work-Related Asthma, 10 Year Update. *J Occup Environ Med* 2020; 62: 130-137.
 - Reilly, MJ, Rosenman KD. Work-Related Asthma Mortality, Michigan 2003-2023. *J Occup Env Med* 2025 (In Press).

The program at MSU provides the following important activity:

- Education and consultation to medical providers on diagnosing and treating individuals with heavy metal poisoning from arsenic, cadmium, lead and mercury and work-related lung disease.
- Educational material used by employers, health and safety professionals, and individuals to prevent work-related injuries and illnesses.
- Special efforts to reduce work-related injuries in youth.
<https://oem.msu.edu/images/resources/TeenInjuries/WorkingYouthReport.pdf>
- Special efforts to reduce work-related injuries in agriculture.
<https://oem.msu.edu/index.php/work-related-injuries/farm-related-injuries>
- Special efforts to reduce pesticide-related injuries.
<https://oem.msu.edu/index.php/work-related-injuries/pesticide-illness-and-injury>
- Special efforts to reduce work-related fatalities.
<https://oem.msu.edu/index.php/work-related-injuries/work-related-fatalities>

The uncertainty of funding will markedly change future activity in occupational health and safety surveillance at MSU. We are still reviewing options and alternative sources of funding. We do know that because of the loss of NIOSH funds, we will no longer be able to print and mail this quarterly newsletter. Some of you already receive the newsletter via email and no action by you is needed to continue to receive the newsletter.

If you are currently receiving a paper copy and wish to continue to receive the quarterly newsletter in the future, please send your email address to careytr@msu.edu

We appreciate all the support and kind words that we have received over the years for our work in protecting workers' health and safety and remain hopeful through advocacy and legal challenges that NIOSH, and state based programs like ours and the ERC at the University of Michigan and others throughout the country can continue to work to address the important public health issue of workplace health and safety.

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In this issue: V36n3: Decimation of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

*PS Remember to report all cases of occupational disease!

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Michigan Law Requires
the Reporting of
Known or Suspected
Occupational Diseases
Reporting can be done by:

WEB

oem.msu.edu

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