INTRODUCTION TO TOTAL WORKER HEALTH® FOR WORKER SAFETY, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

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Total Worker Health® is defined as policies, programs, and practices that integrate protection from work-related safety and health hazards with promotion of injury and illness prevention efforts to advance worker well-being. Simply put - organizations must first protect workers, and then take a step further by introducing additional policies, programs and practices that advance health, on and off the job. The result, if done well, leads to workers with higher levels of well-being. This directly benefits workers, and by extension, positively impacts the organizations in which they work.

“Traditional occupational safety and health protection programs have primarily concentrated on ensuring that work is safe and that workers are protected from the harms that arise from work itself. Total Worker Health® (TWH®) builds on this approach through the recognition that work is a social determinant of health; job-related factors such as wages, hours of work, workload and stress levels, interactions with coworkers and supervisors, access to paid leave, and health-promoting workplaces all can have an important impact on the well-being of workers, their families, and their communities.”

Today, the TWH® approach supports a holistic understanding of the factors that contribute to worker well-being. Scientific evidence now shows that risk factors in the workplace can contribute to health problems previously considered unrelated to work. For example, there are work-related risk factors for sleep disorders, cardiovascular disease, depression, obesity and many other health conditions. In recognition of these relationships, the TWH® approach focuses on how the workplace environment can eliminate or lessen risks and enhance overall worker health, beyond traditional safety and health concerns. The TWH® approach integrates workplace protections with activities that advance the overall well-being of workers. Establishing policies, programs, and practices in the workplace that focus on advancing the safety, health, and well-being of the workforce may be helpful for individuals, their families, communities, employers, and the economy as a whole.

BUILDING A TOTAL WORKER HEALTH® PROGRAM

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health - NIOSH, from United States of America (USA), has a wide range of resources and tools to assist organizations in building a successful TWH® program. All resources that are available from NIOSH and our Centers of Excellence are available from for the public to use free of charge. Even small steps can start you on the path toward a safer and healthier workforce. The following steps show simple ways you can begin integrating safety, health, and well-being.

• Bring together all of those responsible for workplace health programs, including safety, occupational health, human resources, employee assistance program, disability and related programs;
• Begin with an organization assessment to gauge the current climate of safety, health and well-being;
• Give workers a voice by asking about their challenges, needs and ideas;
• Coordinate strategies across all organization elements;
• Address the shared goal of improving worker safety, health, and well-being by developing shared activities and objectives;
• Assure privacy protections for workers;
• Design health and safety improvements and interventions based on the needs of the workers and the organizational assessment;
• Maximize the input, control and flexibility of workers as jobs are designed and assigned;
• Regularly evaluate your progress by employee viewpoint surveys;
• Ensure that your built environment, policies, and work schedules enhance safety, health, and well-being.

PROMISING PRACTICES IN TOTAL WORKER HEALTH® IN NORTH AMERICAN COMPANIES (FULL DETAILS OF EACH PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTED BELOW CAN BE FOUND HERE: HTTPS://WWW.CDC.GOV/NIOSH/TWH/PRACTICES.HTML)

1. Creating value at Dow Chemical through Total Worker Health® initiatives

The Dow Chemical Company, a global manufacturer and supplier of raw materials with approximately 54,000 employees in 300 sites in 49 countries, has identified employee safety and health as a strategic priority for the company. As part of this priority, a comprehensive system based on Total Worker Health® (TWH®) addresses the complex challenges of advancing the well-being of the company’s employees. According to Thomas John Bender, Dow’s Occupational Physician and Epidemiologist, the company recognizes that employee health is essential to the company’s sustainability. In fact, the company includes TWH® implementation in its 2025 Sustainability Goals and reports regularly on progress in its sustainability reports.

2. Working toward healthier supervision at NIOSH

At NIOSH, protecting and promoting the safety, health, and well-being of diverse worker populations around the globe is a critical part of our work. However, if we are serious about this work, we strongly feel that we must apply the principles that we recommend to other organizations within our own Institute. Importantly, NIOSH workers get the opportunity to regularly provide feedback about their work environment and overall experiences through an annual survey given in all federal workplaces. This showed that NIOSH employees wanted to see improvements in the way team leaders, managers, and supervisors fulfill their duties. A growing body of research shows that a worker’s direct-line supervisor has significant impact on an employee’s safety, morale, work experiences and performance, and even their overall health - both on and off the job. In response, NIOSH’s internal TWH®-focused program, Healthiest NIOSH, created a customized Healthier Supervision training for all workers in supervisory roles at NIOSH.

3. A safety redesign jump-starts health and well-being for L.L.Bean’s aging workforce

At L.L.Bean, Maine’s quintessential outdoor clothing and equipment company, the workforce is growing older. Although advancing age improves problem-solving and teamwork skills, it also adds risk, especially for older workers with physically demanding tasks. Acknowledging this truth helped L.L.Bean look beyond its established safety and health infrastructure, says Deborah Roy, Corporate Director for Health, Safety, and Wellness. The company began taking decisive steps to optimize work processes and prevent injury and illness for all their workers, not only their older ones.
4. Johnson & Johnson: Keeping our business strong

Johnson & Johnson (J&J) already had a robust culture of safety in 1978 when the company developed a vision to also have the healthiest workforce in the world. Over 30 years later, J&J continues to protect and promote the health of its 128,000 workers in 60 countries. J&J leaders recognize that strong safety performance must be ongoing and requires constant nurturing and support. Similarly, worker health and well-being efforts require reenergizing the population and renewing the motivation of employees and families to participate. Through leadership commitment, integration of safety and health into their strategic framework, and extending workplace injury prevention to the home, J&J has achieved demonstrable impacts on the health and safety of its workforce.

5. Health, safety, and well-being: Corporate strategy at Dartmouth-Hitchcock

In 2009, Dartmouth-Hitchcock, an academic medical center in New Hampshire, United States of America (USA), with over 8,000 employees, needed to make a change. Covering over 16,000 workers in its health plans, health care costs were almost 10% of the medical center’s budget and rising faster than health care inflation rates each year. While collaborative, the employee health and safety departments were in different silos and recognized there were opportunities to create synergies with each other’s initiatives. Another challenge was that the medical center had different locations and clinic sites. The leadership of Dartmouth-Hitchcock decided that it could do better and would aim to have the healthiest workforce possible - a goal which the medical center adopted as the corporate vision to ensure sustainability and engagement at every level. As a result, the strategic priority, Live Well/Work Well (LWWW), was created with a mission to create a culture of health, safety, and well-being.

6. Totally engaged in hearing loss prevention

Domtar and 3M were specifically recognized with a Safe-in-Sound Excellence Award® for the comprehensive integration of their hearing loss prevention program beyond the traditional occupational work environment into recreational and community activities enjoyed by their workers, their families, and their neighbors. These plants are leading examples of the effort toward “total worker hearing health” and each is investing in the hearing health of future employees. Both employers recognized the specific non-occupational noise exposures encountered by their workforce and took steps to provide training and hearing protection devices specific to the local sound hazards.

7. State workers’ compensation program taking a lead on workplace wellness

In 2010, 25 to 29 percent of Ohio’s (USA) adult population was considered obese (body mass index equal to or greater than 30) and the largest percent of Ohio’s workforce was between the ages of 45 to 54. While these statistics are comparable to what is occurring nationwide, the Ohio Bureau of Workers’ Compensation (OBWC) is leading the way for Total Worker Health®. Helping employers improve the health and wellness of their workers, OBWC established a Workers’ Compensation Workplace Wellness Grant Program in 2012. The program’s goal is to limit and control the escalating cost of workers’ compensation claims by helping employers develop health and well-being programs for their employees.

8. Erickson living extends care to employees and integrates employee health and wellness

Erickson Living is a full spectrum retirement community with 16 campuses in nine USA states. These communities offer everything from independent apartment living to complete nursing facility care - and provide special features such as wellness classes, exercise facilities, healthy dining options and access to a personal trainer for their residents. While Erickson Living
community had long been known for helping residents reach their health and well-being potential, they recently figured out how to provide this same opportunity to their dedicated employees.

All of these programs represent a variety of worker safety, health and well-being interventions and strategies.

In summary, when designing integrated workplace interventions, worker-centered and work-led programs are best. When workers participate and are given a voice in creating safety and health programs, we see increased effectiveness and engagement - and more sustainability. With well-designed programs, we see a reduction in injuries and accidents, higher levels of productivity, and increased worker satisfaction. Opportunities for enhancing the culture of the organization more broadly are also possible. Reduction in work stress, improved health decisions, and reduced long-term healthcare costs can follow. Ultimately, these benefits flow to the workers themselves, the companies who employ them, the families of workers, and their larger community.