

# The Government Must Take a Leadership Role in Carrying Out Research on New Hazards and Methods to Control Them with Full Support and Involvement of Employees, Unions, and Health Professionals

The Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHAct) established the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) for the primary purpose of conducting research on occupational safety and health hazards and publishing recommendations for new and updating existing OSHA standards. Thus, NIOSH has responsibility for developing the scientific rationale for the promulgation and establishment of OSHA safety and health standards. As a research agency, NIOSH is located within the Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Health and Human Services; whereas, as a regulatory agency, OSHA is located within the U.S. Department of Labor.

NIOSH conducts a number of important scientific activities including:

## >> Health Hazard Evaluations (HHEs).

One of NIOSH's primary activities is the Health Hazard Evaluation Program. This program has produced a number of very important safety and health studies that have both helped in the development of OSHA standards as well as led to significant improvements in working conditions. Under the HHE program, workers and their representatives have the right to request HHE's and participate in the conducting of the HHE's at their workplace. **Unfortunately, during the Bush Administration, funding for the HHE program has been greatly reduced.**

## >> Criteria Documents.

NIOSH also develops and publishes Criteria Documents on occupational safety and health hazards. The technical documents on asbestos, benzene, and cadmium are examples of NIOSH research that have had significant impact on regulations promulgated by OSHA.

## >> Recommended Exposure Levels.

As part of its research agenda, NIOSH develops and issues Recommended Exposure Levels (REL's) for chemicals and hazardous substances. The REL's are usually more strict and stringent than OSHA Permissible Exposure Levels (PEL's) or standards for chemicals and hazardous substances. In addition to internal NIOSH use, the REL's are developed and provided to OSHA for the purpose of updating existing PEL standards, as well as promulgating new PEL's. **Unfortunately, inadequate funding from the Bush Administration and opposition from industry for improved workplace exposure levels have prevented NIOSH from pursuing research on REL's.**

## >> Scientific Literature Reviews and Studies.

As part of its work in supporting the promulgation of new and updating existing OSHA standards, NIOSH conducts scientific literature reviews and studies. For example, in its work supporting the promulgation of a federal ergonomics standard, NIOSH conducted a scientific literature review. The findings from this scientific document demonstrated the relationships between inadequate ergonomic design of work equipment and tools, work environments, and the organization of work with the occurrence of worker cumula-

tive trauma or repetitive motion injuries and illnesses. **Unfortunately, the Bush Administration, along with its allies from the business community, led a legislative assault against American workers killing the OSHA Ergonomics Standard promulgated during the Clinton Administration.**

**In addition, many of the OSHA programs for which NIOSH has provided research have been cut or eliminated by the Bush Administration. Along with the OSHA Ergonomics Standard, following are key examples:**

1. Recordkeeping for ergonomic injuries and illnesses was repealed. The Bush Administration has eliminated the requirement upon employers that ergonomic injuries and illnesses be recorded and categorized on the OSHA 300 Log of Injuries and Illnesses. From CWA's viewpoint, the accurate reporting and recording of cumulative trauma health problems is extremely important to the Union's ongoing efforts to identify and resolve the often disabling and job threatening repetitive motion injuries and illnesses.
2. The Bush Administration has put a stop to the promulgation of new workplace safety and health rules. These include rules on safety and health programs, cancer-causing chemicals, reactive chemicals, and protections against infectious diseases such as tuberculosis.
3. The Bush Administration has tried to cut the budgets for OSHA, NIOSH, and the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA). However, as a result of the successful legislative efforts of the labor movement and its allies, these cuts have been prevented. In fact, with the approval of U.S. Congress these activities have produced small budgetary increases.

**Contact the CWA Occupational Safety and Health Department  
at [www.cwasafetyandhealth.org](http://www.cwasafetyandhealth.org).**

