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American Industrial Hygiene Association Recommendations for Protecting Workers In the Aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

The devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita along the Gulf Coast region poses many challenges in the remediation, recovery and reconstruction efforts. Thousands of workers will be needed for the enormous tasks of salvage, demolition, cleanup and rebuilding operations, many supported by public funds. The conditions encountered during these operations will likely pose significant health and safety risks to workers that should be addressed if workers are to be protected and if residents and businesses are to feel safe and confident enough to return. Protection of worker health and safety should be a condition of public contracts for remediation.

The American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) stands ready to provide leadership, assistance and guidance to ensure that workers are provided with appropriate health and safety protections.

In order to achieve this objective, the AIHA believes that the following safety and health initiatives are critical, and if acted upon, will help to provide the necessary protections for the affected workers.

- Enforce compliance with all applicable federal, state and local health and safety standards.
- Develop mechanisms to ensure that state and local public employees are protected by OSHA standards during the recovery and reconstruction activity.
- Require that all contracts let for this work include pre-qualifications for the work based on the health and safety performance of the contractors.
- Require site safety and health plans for all work projects and involve workers in developing the plans.
- Conduct site-specific hazard and risk assessments before work is performed. Identify workers likely to be at high risk of hazardous exposures.

AIHA

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Advancing Occupational and Environmental Health
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- Provide health and safety training to workers appropriate to the work being performed and the hazards they likely to be encountered.
- Conduct appropriate personal exposure monitoring to ensure that engineering and personal protective equipment controls are adequate. Ensure that analysis of samples is completed by NIOSH/OSHA approved methods; other validated methods, and by AIHA accredited laboratories.
- Health hazard assessment and control strategies should be developed by, or under the supervision of a qualified and competent individual, such as a Certified Industrial Hygienist (CIH).
- Provide personal protective equipment to workers, within a program which includes guidance on selection, use, and decontamination.
- Where anticipated or actual exposures to health hazards indicate, establish and maintain appropriate medical monitoring and surveillance programs and develop a registry to follow workers over time. Provide immunizations and mental health services for workers as deemed appropriate by medical personnel.
- Establish communications systems between medical teams and chemical exposure and physical hazard assessment professionals.
- OSHA should coordinate its efforts with other appropriate federal and state agencies (DHS, NIOSH, and NIEHS), employers, safety and health professional associations, trade associations and labor unions to ensure that workers are protected.
- Establish a calibration and equipment maintenance lab where field industrial hygienists, safety professionals and hazmat specialists can calibrate and maintain their testing equipment and supplies.
- Establish a central data repository for exposure monitoring results, including baseline and exposure-related area monitoring, as part of the medical surveillance system.
- Establish and coordinate effective communication and cooperation between all private employers and federal, state and local governments at all levels who are engaged in activities in response to the aftermath of the hurricanes.