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Subject: 182 - Draft Construction Program Plan
Attachments: Knut
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Please see attached in reference to docket 182.

Docket Number NIOSH-182

Comments on NIOSH Action Plan in Response to NA Construction Program (CO) Review

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Note:

These comments are solely my personal views.

They may or may not reflect views of organizations that I may be affiliated with.

Abbreviations used in this Submission

ADR2P is the Associate Director for R2P (a new position at NIOSH)

CC is the National Construction Center, a cooperative agreement currently awarded to CPWR

CO is NIOSH Construction Research Program

COSH is Construction Occupational Safety and Health

DSR is Division of Safety Research

NA is the National Academy Review Committee

OEP is the Office of Extramural Activities

ORTT is Office of Research and Technology Transfer

General Comments

This is not an action plan, and it is largely non-responsive to the NA recommendations.

- There is way too little specificity
- There are no clear action items
- There is no assignment of responsibility
- Deliverables are not described
- There are no time schedules

There are three big recommendations in this report, and the CO's plan does not address any of them meaningfully:

- There should be more emphasis on R2P
- The CO needs more resources.

- The CO program office needs to be strengthened

This is such a complacent document that you might be led to think that perhaps the NIOSH staff concluded that the favorable scores from the review suggest that the CO is fine as it is and would not benefit significantly from improvement.

Most importantly, the NA review wanted to see more impact; yet, there is nothing in this plan to point to any measurable improvements in impacts. In this respect it is important to note that the documentation the plan incorporates in the appendixes were included in the NA review and were considered by the Committee before it prepared the recommendations.

Compare the CO plan to the action plan developed by the NIOSH Personal Protective Technology Program in response to its NA Review. They are like night and day and it is hard to believe that these plans were developed in response to the same kind of review, which suggests that the program staff may not have been provided adequate guidance by NIOSH's leadership. Nevertheless, presumably someone in NIOSH's leadership reviewed and signed off on this action plan before it was released. It is not unreasonable to wonder why the leadership has invested so much in these reviews, and demanded so much from the volunteers who served on the NA review committees, if it expects so little from its staff in response to the reviews.

This plan was not developed with any stakeholder input. Had there been external involvement in the drafting of the plan it is likely many of the shortcomings would have been corrected.

Response to NA Recommendation 1: Research-to-practice (r2p) efforts should involve individuals trained in or having the experience and skills to create strategic diffusion and social marketing plans for National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Research and to evaluate such plans' effectiveness.

The action plan is not responsive to the most important part of the recommendation, which is: "...creating strategic diffusion and social marketing plans." The Action plan makes no mention of

- How R2P expertise will result in such plans
- What those plans will consist of
- Who will be responsible for developing and implementing the plans
- etc

The action plan talks mostly about what NIOSH is doing, not what the CO is doing: (1) NIOSH has undertaken a review of the ORTT; (2) NIOSH has undertaken a leadership survey; (3) NIOSH is in the process of hiring a new ADR2P;

- How is this relevant for CO?
- How does this translate into an action item for CO?
- What kinds of outputs and impacts will this result in specifically for CO?

The plan then says that the CO will interact with the ORTT and the new ADR2P to improve access to expertise and resources for enhancing r2p planning and activities in the construction sector

- Who in CO is responsible for "interacting" and what exactly does this mean in terms of actions?
For instance,
 - who will be in charge of interacting with ORTT and the new ADR2P and
 - what kind of support does the CO expect or require from ORTT and the ADR2P to complete the mission of the CO,
 - How can the CO depend on the ORTT and ADR2P given that it is unlikely they know anything about construction, and given that the CO will need to compete with other NIOSH programs for the resources of the ORTT and ADR2P?

The only specific action items for CO are

- A reference to working with equipment manufacturers, mainly in fall protection.
 - Which manufacturers
 - How will manufacturers be involved
 - What are the anticipated outputs
 - How will impact be measured
 - Is there any involvement with other programs in NIOSH (e.g., PPT or safety research)
 - Who is responsible for this activity
 - What are the milestones
- A reference to " increasing efforts to include outputs generated by external grantees and partners in the Construction Program's r2p efforts"
 - What does this mean
 - Who are the "partners" referred to
 - What exactly are the "Construction Program's r2p efforts"
 - Who is responsible for this activity
 - How do partners get incentivized to take on this additional role
 - What expertise do the partners have in technology transfer
 - How will CO measure impact
 - Etc, etc...
- A reference to the CC being well poised to serve this purpose
 - What are the specific roles of the CC and the CO Program office
 - How will CO Program Office interact with CC given that the CC cooperative agreement specifies that OEP is the program contact
 - Are there specific deliverables that the CO Program Office will expect from the CC
 - How will CC Program Office determine that the CO, including the CC, is meeting NIOSH's R2P expectations?
 - Who is responsible
 - Etc, Etc

Response to Recommendation 2: Consideration should be given to having the majority of research-to-practice efforts of the Construction Research Program conducted through the National Construction Center.

The action plan makes primarily reference to the CC RFA's focus on R2P. But it then goes on to say, "While we agree that the Construction Center is well poised and may be less constrained to conduct R2P, NIOSH must continue to assume responsibility in this area as well." This contradiction needs to be resolved:

- In its response to Rec 1, NIOSH leaned heavily on the CC to explain how it was going to assure R2P. Here it says NIOSH must be responsible.
- Since NIOSH has never assumed real responsibility for this program in the first place (see Rec 4), how can it "assume responsibility *in this area as well.*"[emphasis added]
 - Who will be responsible
 - How will he or she carry out this responsibility
 - What are the expected outputs
 - How will impact be measured
 - What's the time line

The action plan says NIOSH must be responsible because "The NIOSH intramural project planning process requires that all research projects include a solid plan for transferring project results to practice or to the next phase in the research-to-practice continuum."

- How does CO Program office review and assure that "plans are solid"
- What does "solid" mean: what does the required output look like
- How is impact measured
- Who is responsible for assuring that this happens

Response to Recommendation 3: High-level attention should be given to determining how to provide program resources that are commensurate with a more robust pursuit of the Construction Research Program's goals.

In fairness to the program staff this is a no win recommendation since the program staff don't control the NIOSH budget and since the staff can't say they will lobby hard for more earmarked funding.

Having said that, the CO plan discusses what it is supposedly doing or planning to do, but there is no evidence that this will lead to more funding or better use of resources. This is what the plan consists of:

- CO will conduct "a goals-driven program."
 - What does that mean, NORA goals?
 - Are all NORA goals equally important?
 - What about important risks not addressed by NORA goals (such as COPD)
- Ensuring that that all intramural research projects include a solid plan for transferring project results to the next phase in the research-to practice continuum
 - This is the third time in this document this has been mentioned, but the process for achieving it has not been defined
- Having strategies in place to identify and address emerging issues
 - What are these strategies
 - Who is responsible
- Having the Sector Council "leverage resources"
 - Are there any specific plans for this leveraging
 - Who is doing it
 - What are the other agencies or stakeholders involved

- How much in additional resources will this leveraging result in and how will the resources be allocated
- What's the time line
- Etc, etc.

Response to Recommendation 4: The Construction Program Coordinator and the Manager of the Construction Research Program should be continued as full-time positions.

This recommendation was aimed at giving the CO the opportunity to propose a real program office (much like the mining sector program office.) Here the plan is clearly unresponsive to the recommendation: it says that the existing organization is adequate and that the NA Committee erred in its recommendation.

The NA review recognized that a program that is responsible for a sector that accounts for some 20-25% of all occupational fatalities, injuries and most likely illnesses, should be managed by a full-time program director. It is absurd to conclude, like this action plan seems to do, that a program of this magnitude can be managed by 1.5 FTE professionals. If nothing else, the poor quality of this action plan points to the need for much more program management support at NIOSH.

There is no real discussion of the dual role of the CO Program Director, who is also Director of the Division of Safety Research. While this dual position could lead to better coordination in the area of safety research which is critical to COSH, it could just as likely to lead to conflicts, especially over funding. If the CO and DSR are competing for the same resources, what's the likelihood of the Program Director siding with CO at the expense of DSR (important point in terms of the response to recommendation no 3)? There are other areas where such conflicts can come into play as well, such as selection of intramural projects for funding using CO dollars (important point in response to recommendations 1,2, 3), or if they are competing for support from ORTT or the ADR2P (important point in the plan's response to recommendation no. 1.)

There is no real discussion of a management plan to assure that the CO is integrated between intramural research, the CC and investigator-initiated extramural research in light of the very significant role that the OEP commands over the CC and the investigator-initiated extramural research. There is reference to OEP staff participation on the CO steering committee helps integrate extramural and intramural researchers and projects, but there is no evidence that this is really working.

Response to Recommendation 5: The National Construction Center should continue to be used as an important component in the Construction Research Program.

The plan agrees but gives no specifics on how NIOSH plans to administer the CO so that it assures that the CC is an integral part of it. Again, there is no explanation of the role of OEP in this relationship.

Response to Recommendation 6: The Construction Research Program should establish a closer connection with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and other regulatory or consensus standards organizations to help ensure that the program's research is applied effectively in rulemaking efforts.

The main element of this recommendation is that the CO should *increase* its involvement with OSHA. The plan is the most specific in terms of actions taken to date, but it does not describe how ongoing and future interactions will be administered, what the expected outputs are, and how it will measure the impact. In fairness to the program staff, there is a lot of uncertainty because of OSHA's transition, but that should not preclude the CO staff from providing a clear vision about where it would like this relationship to go, and then a plan for how to get there.