

Montana Occupational Health and Safety Surveillance Program (MOHSS) Annual Report (Fundamental): July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017

Julia Brennan, MPH, Principal Investigator and Epidemiologist
Montana Department of Labor & Industry, Employment Relations Division
Tel: (406) 444-1722 Email: jbrennan@mt.gov

Project Overview

The aims of the MOHSS program are to report occupational health indicators annually, assess data quality in occupational health data sources, create new data sources for occupational health surveillance, form a steering committee to review and discuss activities, provide information and support for prevention and intervention programs, establish a state occupational health surveillance website, perform occupational health research and share results, and to participate in occupational health meetings and conferences.

Major Accomplishments, Outputs, and Outcomes

Building foundation for research and set priorities for MOHSS activities

All 24 occupational health indicators were calculated and sent to NIOSH for 2014. We prepared a full report on trends in the occupational health indicators in Montana from 2004 to 2014, using preliminary data for 2014. Findings and recommendations from this trends report were presented at several stakeholder meetings across Montana (described below), and an overview of the results was shared via the MOHSS occupational health newsletter. This investigation into occupational health trends in Montana helped us to identify major industries and issues to focus on for intervention and prevention purposes, as well as setting priorities for research activities. Moving forward, MOHSS is going to emphasize Construction, Agriculture, Manufacturing, Health Care, and Transportation in our research efforts. Additionally, the preparation of the trends report and subsequent presentations familiarized us with available occupational health data sources to be used for future projects, including numerous sources in the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) and Montana workers' compensation data within the Department of Labor & Industry (DLI). MOHSS has direct access to Montana workers' compensation data, and we have participated in trainings and conferences in the past year to increase understanding of the workers' compensation system and unique challenges to using the data in Montana.

Potential Outcome: Sharing information and recommendations on high-priority occupational health issues with stakeholders can be used to inform intervention and prevention programs in key industries. Improved knowledge of available data sources will increase the relevance and accuracy of MOHSS research projects.

Establishing partnerships and collaboration opportunities

We built many solid partnerships and collaborations during this grant year. To start, we revitalized the MOHSS Steering Committee, and increased the representativeness of the committee. Professionals and researchers participated from DPHHS' Injury Prevention Program, DPHHS' Hospital Discharge Data System, DLI's Safety and Health Bureau, University of Montana's Department of Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Montana Department of Environmental Quality's Small Business Environmental Assistance Program, DPHHS' Office of Epidemiology and Scientific Support, Lewis and Clark County Public Health Department, and DLI's Research and Analysis Bureau. These new Steering Committee meetings have resulted in many key ideas for collaborative projects, and jump-started connections between data sources and previously-disconnected departments. Additionally, MOHSS has established relationships with the Montana Ag Safety Program, OSHA Area Office in Billings, Montana Highway Patrol, Department of Transportation, SafetyFestMT outreach program, Montana Safety Services Council, Montana State Fund safety coordinators, and DLI's Research and Analysis Bureau economists. Another collaboration highlight is a grant award to study safety practices in the oil & gas industry in Montana, in partnership with a team of

economists at DLI's Research & Analysis Bureau (awarded May 2017). In Montana, real change and impact occur through collaboration and sharing of ideas and information, so these partnerships are especially essential to future success of the MOHSS program.

Potential Outcome: Emphasizing occupational health issues across departments and organizations in Montana will increase the ability to affect real change in workplaces across the state, and build capacity for impactful research projects in the future.

Intermediate Outcome: Inclusion of occupational health data and findings into DPPHS policies and recommendations to set state-wide priorities will increase awareness of occupational health issues in the public health community and action plans.

Established MOHSS website and increased outreach to stakeholders

We created a brand-new website for the MOHSS program – www.mtworkerhealth.com. Previously, the MOHSS resources were posted on a general publications page for DLI's workers' compensation claims assistance bureau. The new website includes reports and data from the MOHSS program, as well as safety and health resources for different industries and occupational health topics. We also created a new logo and "branding" for the MOHSS program, which has proved to be very useful when providing outreach and connecting to different stakeholder communities. We discovered that stakeholder groups, employers, and workers were hesitant to speak openly with MOHSS staff at SafetyFestMT trainings, due to confusion about the differences between OSHA and MOHSS. Therefore, we created a logo and name that emphasized the worker health side of the MOHSS program (MTWorkerHealth), and visually differentiated the MOHSS program from OSHA. Immediate impacts were noticed during interactions with stakeholders after emphasizing the new logo and name; employers and workers were more candid in sharing concerns and issues with the PI. Additionally, we disseminated occupational health information and findings in our new Occupational Health Newsletters via email lists, which are produced quarterly and in concise, one-page formats. We also participated in writing a blog post for a special edition of DPHHS' Health in the 406 newsletter, and a blog series based on the Industry Spotlight pages for the DLI Labor Market Information blog. MOHSS also presented key information to diverse stakeholder groups at the following presentations:

Presentations:

- September 21, 2016: Montana Tech occupational health and epidemiology program
 - Presented an overview of the MOHSS program and initial findings on occupational health indicator trends from upcoming report
- October 12, 2016: Labor Management Advisory Council meeting, DLI
 - Presented an overview of occupational health indicator trends from upcoming report
- December 14, 2016: Labor Management Advisory Council meeting, DLI
 - Presented findings and recommendations on health care worker assaults in MT
- March 9, 2017: Montana Safety Services Council Annual Conference
 - Presented overview of MOHSS program and recommendations from occupational health indicators report, including industry-specific workers' compensation data
- April 5, 2017: Workers' Compensation Leadership Team meeting, DLI
- May 24, 2017: DLI Commissioner and Administrators Meeting, DLI
 - Presented overview of MOHSS program and activities, emphasizing ability to impact worker health and safety in Montana

Potential Outcome: Sharing of occupational health information with diverse stakeholder communities maximizes the potential for the information to be used to increase worker and employer awareness, improve safety trainings at workplaces, inform legislative policy, and guide DLI emphasis programs.

Provide occupational health information and support

MOHSS was also able to provide major support and information to stakeholder groups on several occupational health issues, outside of the scope of other research projects. The Montana Nurses Association requested that the PI act as an informational witness during a legislative bill committee meeting, based on MOHSS' report on health care worker assaults. The PI was able to answer direct questions from House Representatives about data collection methods, exclusions, definitions, and conclusions of the report. It was rewarding to see the data and results of the report being put to good use to emphasize the extent of this occupational health issue in Montana. The OSHA Area Director and Assistant Area Director also requested the help of the MOHSS program to provide feedback on the relevance of local and regional emphasis programs in Montana. We shared our findings with the Area Director and Assistant Area Director in-person, and discussed how our programs can help each other improve worker health and safety in Montana, with practical approaches and informed policies. Safety coordinators at the Montana State Fund also requested information from MOHSS on injury data for the Agriculture industry in Montana over the last several years. We put together summary information based on BLS data and Montana workers' compensation data that can be used to improve the State Fund's training and outreach efforts.

Potential Outcome: Sharing information as requested by outside stakeholder groups may lead to increased collaboration in the future on projects, and increased access to occupational health information outside of the department. These types of collaborations and projects increase the practical use of MOHSS research and findings.

Intermediate Outcome: This information was directly used by the Montana Nurses Association to provide evidence of health care worker assaults in Montana in an attempt to change policy at the legislative level. This information was also used by the OSHA Area Office in Billings to select and inform emphasis programs for Montana.

New Publications:

- Assaults on Healthcare Workers in Montana (*full report*) (November 2016)
- Occupational Health Indicators: Montana 2004-2014 (*full report*) (March 2017)
- Occupational Health Newsletter #1: Overview of MOHSS (March 2017)
- Industry Spotlight Fact Sheets for 12 industries in Montana (June 2017)
- Occupational Health Newsletter #2: Industry Spotlight – Construction (June 2017)

State Website Resources:

- New website for MOHSS program: www.mtworkerhealth.com
 - Designed the website to include noteworthy occupational health news, reports and information from the MOHSS program, safety and health resources, training resources, and data sources.