

Annual Performance Report – July 2008

State: Connecticut

Project: Connecticut Occupational Health Expanded Surveillance

Principal Investigator: Thomas St. Louis, MSPH

Type of Program: Fundamental

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (CT DPH) is continuing longitudinal analysis of occupational disease underreporting in partnership with our collaborators at the University of Connecticut Health Center's Department of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (UConn DOEM), through comparison of existing data sources. Comparison of data from the Occupational Illness and Injury Surveillance System (OISS) and the Connecticut Workers' Compensation Commission is performed annually in order to estimate the amount of occupational disease underreporting that occurs in Connecticut.

A comparison of overlapping reports in the two systems for the most recent one-year period found 133 occupational disease cases reported to both systems (25 lung, 65 musculoskeletal, 36 skin, and 7 other). This yielded an unadjusted estimate of 29,700 unreported occupational illnesses (in addition to the 4,381 unique cases reported to at least one system) for a total estimate of 34,081 cases. This resulted in an estimate of only 8.9% of occupational illness cases being reported to the Workers' Compensation system, and 4.4% of cases reported to the OISS.

Our current funding has allowed us to continue our analysis of all 19 occupational health indicators for Connecticut. Currently, analysis of data from 2005 is complete. In total, Connecticut has a six-year dataset of compiled indicators for the years 2000-2005. In 2008, a summary data report of all compiled Connecticut indicators and demographic profile data was provided to the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE), which acts as the NIOSH-designated clearinghouse for this information from participating states. In addition, a Connecticut-specific occupational health indicators web report was completed during this funding period, and has been published to the Connecticut Department of Public Health's website at http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/environmental_health/eoha/pdf/indicatorswebreport.pdf.

Connecticut's occupational health indicators web report includes summary data for each of the 19 indicators along with information from the demographic profile for the years 2000-2004. Comparisons of Connecticut data to U.S. data are also included in this report. This web-based report will be updated annually, and shared with Connecticut stakeholders, regional partners, and other interested parties.

In addition to our previous work with chronic disease programs in our state, the Occupational Health Unit now also provides indicator data specific to work-related injuries to the Connecticut Department of Public Health's Injury Program and also represents the interests of occupational injury prevention in Connecticut as a member of the Connecticut Injury Community Planning Group (ICPG). The ICPG developed a statewide injury plan in 2007, and incorporated indicator data for the years 2000-2004 to aid in developing priorities and goals for the occupational injuries section of the plan.

Presently, all work-related carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning, mercury poisoning, and occupational asthma activities are on schedule. Due to a very low response rate to CO poisoning surveys, (5% during 2005 and early 2006) we will no longer be sending out surveys for each reported CO case. This change was implemented in Spring 2006, because of the lack of return on the resources expended in sending the surveys. However, follow-up surveys for occupational asthma and mercury will continue whenever cases are received. For the 12-month period from

April 1, 2006 through March 31, 2007, the CT DPH OIISS received 27 work-related asthma reports. During the same 12-month period, the CT DPH received 79 cases of CO poisoning. An additional 46 cases of CO poisoning have been received to date since March 31, 2007. Of the 125 CO cases received since April 1, 2006, 56 (45%) were found to be work-related. In addition to CO and work-related asthma reports, CT DPH received 21 cases of mercury poisoning (≥ 1.5 ug/dl blood or ≥ 35 ug/g creatinine in urine) during the 12-month period April 1, 2006 through March 31, 2007. Of those 21 cases, none were found to be work-related.

Activities relating to the CT Occupational Safety and Health Planning and Action Network (OSH-PLAN), our advisory workgroup, are currently on schedule. CT DPH and our collaborators at the UConn DOEM have appointed 15 specific members to this advisory workgroup, including physicians, members of the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA), representatives from the CT Council on Occupational Safety and Health (ConnectiCOSH), private occupational health and safety consultants, insurers, and other groups with vested interests in improving workplace safety and health in our state. Currently, the CT DPH Occupational Health Unit and UConn DOEM staff members hold meetings on a quarterly basis to share information and to ensure the group is on target to meet the key objectives of this project. Input from the members of the advisory group has been compiled to develop an OSH-PLAN draft final report. Key objectives to be outlined in this report include priority work-related health conditions and hazards in our state, emerging occupational health issues, problems with existing surveillance systems and approaches, and recommendations for future actions. On June 3, 2008, OSH-PLAN convened a workshop designed to gather feedback pertaining to the draft report, and finalize specific priorities. Next steps include reviewing and prioritizing the OSH-PLAN recommendations and publishing a finalized report in late-2008.

In 2007, collaboration began between the CT DPH Occupational Health Unit and our regional partners in Massachusetts, New York and New Jersey to further analyze Occupational Health Indicator #6, *Hospitalizations for Work-Related Burns*. During the Northeast Regional Occupational Health Surveillance Meeting in May 2008, collaborating states met and compared their data in a working breakout session. The group also formulated an outline for a regional publication, and discussed steps on how to formally report our findings to stakeholders. The analysis involved extracting cost data for work-related burn hospitalizations and comparing that data to costs for other, non-burn work-related hospitalizations. This analysis allowed our group to determine the cost burden associated with this type of occupational injury. Final project goals include a regional publication and development of a NIOSH e-News contribution during the summer of 2008.

Currently, the CT DPH Occupational Health Unit continues its publication of quarterly Health Alerts. These shorter, more targeted publications have a more direct positive impact than a more general newsletter because they are provided directly to the at-risk targeted audience. The Winter 2007 Health Alert focusing on carbon monoxide dangers associated with the use of gas-powered engines in enclosed work areas was mailed to construction companies in Connecticut, through a partnership developed with the Connecticut Construction Industries Association (CCIA). This partnership resulted in the distribution of this Health Alert to over 500 CCIA member companies through their monthly mailed newsletter, and to over 100 members who subscribe online. The Summer 2007 Health Alert, titled "Bronchiolitis Obliterans in Workers Exposed to Food Flavorings", was recently published, and copies were mailed to all Connecticut pulmonologists and allergists. All Health Alerts will continue to be published to the CT DPH website for easy accessibility by the targeted audience and other interested stakeholders.