

Inside

From the Executive Director 2

AIC News 5

Annual Meeting News 6

FAIC News 6

JAIC News 7

Allied Organizations 7

Sustainability Committee 9

New Publications 12

People 12

In Memoriam 12

Worth Noting 14

Grants & Fellowships 15

Conservation Training Programs 16

Specialty Group Columns 20

Network Columns 26

Courses, Conferences, & Seminars 29

The AIC Health and Safety Committee in the International Arena

By Joanne Klaar Walker, Kathryn Makos, and James Roy Smith

In June 2013, the Laboratoire de Conservation, Restauration et Recherches (LC2R, Draguignan, Provence, France) held a symposium in Figanières, France, devoted to an international discussion about health and safety in the museum environment. This symposium provided an exchange of ideas and knowledge on safety practices, hazard analyses tools, and online resource sites that were found to be effective internationally. In a symposium where 45 nations and five continents were represented, the AIC Health and Safety Committee (H&S) was the sole registrant from the United States.

Although the laws vary from country to country, the basic tenets of an effective Safety Management Program are universally recognized, and the international resources and organizations that provide safety guidance for management and for workers are well established. These resources include professional safety organizations, public health research websites, and the aid of occupational safety professionals to develop, organize, administer, manage, evaluate, train, and implement lab safety programs. Conservators working for academic, government, or larger private institutions will benefit from on-staff safety professionals. Smaller museums can also avail themselves of government assistance, fire department inspections, private safety contractors, or insurance risk inspectors. Globally, private conservators generally need to rely on whatever safety support systems exist within their project sites or be self-taught in safety (especially for home studio set-up) through literature, classes, and professional organization resources.

The following outlines recommended safety resources available to the international community, national U.S. regulations and the various means used by American institutions to manage the health and safety needs of their employees, and the critical elements of a good, pro-active Safety Management Program. It also provides insight into AIC's professional commitment to the well-being of their membership through the H&S Committee's efforts to educate the AIC membership about the responsibilities and risks involved in the conservation field. [see Resource List]

International and American Safety Guidelines

Every developed nation has some regulations regarding worker safety that, in turn, have led to establishment of public health professions including occupational medicine. From the United Nations World Health Organizations and International Labour Organization, (both publish environmental health studies and standards) to each country's individual public health standard-setting agencies, there are robust sets of occupational disease registries and surveillance guidelines in many countries.

In America, safe work practice is a legal requirement for all employers to establish, provide, and maintain a safe and healthful environment not only for staff, but also for volunteers, interns, apprentices, visiting researchers, and the visiting public. The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 was passed to prevent workers from

Dates to remember!

Sept. 16, 2013 - Abstract submissions due for annual meeting presentations

Nov. 1, 2013 - Kress Publication Fellowship proposals due; Rome Prize competition application due

Nov. 23, 2013 - IAG Meeting in Washington, DC

Feb. 28, 2014 - Nominations due for open board positions

The AIC Health and Safety Committee in the International Arena
continued from front cover

being killed or seriously harmed at work. The Act created the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), which sets and enforces protective workplace safety and health standards. Regulations created by OSHA require employers to have a safety program in place to prevent workplace illnesses and injuries and prevent overexposures to hazardous substances and conditions. OSHA also provides information, training, and assistance to workers and employers. Workers may file a complaint to have OSHA inspect their workplace if they believe their employer is not following OSHA standards or that there are serious hazards. Workers also have the right to obtain copies of their medical records, results of testing for hazards in the workplace, and to review records of work-related illnesses and injuries at their workplace.

Safety, industrial hygiene, and fire protection professionals on staff at institutions in the U.S. are responsible for evaluating and monitoring workplace risks, developing and designing controls to reduce those risks, training staff on recognizing hazards and properly using the control methods, and continually re-evaluating whether the controls are effective in preventing illness or injury to workers. An important professional resource includes the field of occupational medicine. An occupational physician examines a worker with regard to the chemicals and exposure risks in accordance with work tasks. The University of Illinois School of Public Health's "Health in the Arts" program is an example of occupational physicians specializing in this field.

Comprehensive Health and Safety Programs for Museums

In any country, an effective safety program starts at the top and is propelled by pro-active commitment from management to build and sustain a strong safety culture throughout all levels of the organization. Morally, management also must believe, commit to, and impress upon its staff the ethic that no job, exhibit displays, or research project is so important or so urgent that one cannot take time to perform that function safely and in compliance with environmental regulations. In the U.S., an effective safety and health program is morally and legally required, boosts employee productivity and involvement, and enhances the financial bottom-line by reducing workers compensation claims and liability insurance premiums. (Smithsonian 2013)

Each organization's safety program should address the following four elements:

Management Commitment:

- Establishing and communicating a written program, including measurable goals for reducing illnesses and injuries.
- Committing a budget to ensure the success of the safety program, including hiring or contracting with safety and health professionals to operate the program.
- Making sure all staff levels, particularly supervisors, understand their responsibilities for working safely.

- Actively seeking staff input in decisions that affect their health and safety. Management should reward input and create a vehicle (like a safety committee) that allows for a meaningful exchange of best practice ideas.

Risk Evaluation and Management:

- Understanding and controlling your risks are the most important steps any conservator can take – especially those in private practice or working in 2-3 person shops. A **Job Hazard Analysis** or **Lab Safety Plan** will organize the hazards and controls needed and serve as constant training and reminder. Conservators must recognize and realize the value of their participation in this process of identifying health hazards for themselves and for their coworkers.

Job Hazard Analysis: commonly used decision logic procedure breaking down a job by tasks, materials used, possible safety/health/fire risks from tasks and materials, and controls/safe work practices required to prevent harm from those risks.

Lab Safety Plan, or Chemical Hygiene Plan: OSHA required plan for prevention of all lab related risks including chemical overexposures or reactions, hood malfunctions, restrictions on working alone, high hazard/cancer causing agent special controls. A Job Hazard Analysis forms the basis of a Lab Safety Plan.

- Prevention and constant monitoring to be sure hazard controls are working properly remain the primary tools for minimizing work related health disorders. Early detection of work illnesses is especially important. The key is in sharing complete work histories with your personal and company physician(s), including information on the chemicals and processes that may give rise to adverse exposures. [see *Resource List*] Needless testing and costs may be avoided by providing your doctor with a comprehensive work history. This is very important because many illnesses have long latency, and work history from prior years will be vital in successfully diagnosing cause and effect.

Training:

- All staff must be provided with the safety skills and training necessary to conduct an effective safety program, work safely and maintain a safe work environment. Workers need to fully understand the implications of not using controls properly or not reporting unsafe conditions. Involving workers in the process of contributing and discussing safe work practices will invest everyone in the process and responsibility for protecting co-workers. Periodic and random drills will keep training fresh, and periodic group reviews of lab safety plans or other measures will make safety a regular expectation within work culture. In the U.S., one of the basic requirements is the Hazard Communication Standard, which states that every worker has the "right to know" what hazardous chemicals they are working with and what controls have been put in place to protect them from harm.

The AIC Health and Safety Committee in the International Arena *continued from page 3*

Injury and Incident Reporting and Investigation:

- Injury and incident reporting and investigating are crucial for an effective safety program. The purpose and intent is to establish root causes for a specific injury or incident and protocols that will prevent repeat occurrences. It is imperative that the reporting process not be used as a way to assign blame or fault for the injury or incident. If employees perceive the reporting process as way to punish staff members, some will be hesitant to report the facts, which could result in improper findings from the investigation. Everyone involved in the work process is responsible for assisting in investigation when an accident occurs, so that they all can understand probable causes and work toward preventing re-occurrence.

Most museum, artistic, historic, and cultural institution work-sites are protected by OSHA regulations. However, it is critical for conservators to know that the OSHA Act does not cover those who are self-employed. Conservators in private practice are protected by safety regulations when they work for or within companies or institutions that are covered by these laws, and conservators need to read the safety fact sheets on the OSHA website [see *Resource List*]. Self-employed workers without the benefit of an employer safety and health office must rely on professional organizations like AIC to supply important safety education and training.

Resources Offered by AIC's Health and Safety Committee

AIC is a fortunate to have a committee charged with this purpose. As such, it has an important role in the education not only of its members, but also for the global conservation community.

AIC's H&S Committee is charged with increasing the knowledge of safety hazards and general health issues related to the conservation profession by providing educational and technical information to the AIC membership. The Committee maintains current information through research and by collaboration with health and safety professionals and with other health and safety organizations. AIC's H&S Committee is a crucial resource to keep conservators and conservation professionals informed about their rights and responsibilities, including the best ways to prevent accidents, clean up spills, and dispose of hazardous materials. In addition, this committee provides a crucial link for those conservators who are in private practice and do not have the benefits that an institutional safety committee or department can offer.

Future goals of the H&S Committee include replicating our respirator fit testing workshop for distribution to regional conservation groups throughout the U.S. We will provide conservators throughout the country with access to the OSHA-required lecture online through AIC (without having to attend AIC's annual meeting). The online lecture will conclude with an exam to make sure the participant(s) understand what was taught. Most crucially, the AIC H&S Committee will act as a liaison between users of the online lecture and trained safety professionals in their area who are able to perform a respirator fit test.

The H&S Committee is also currently planning a new initiative to encourage conservators to incorporate stretching and movement into their workdays. In a field where people are often in uncomfortable positions for long periods of time, it is important to remember to stretch and move out of these poses periodically to avoid injury and discomfort. We plan to introduce this idea through an article in the *AIC News*, and to incorporate it into AIC's annual meeting in San Francisco in 2014.

SELECT INTERNATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY WEB-BASED RESOURCES

RESEARCH, NATIONAL STANDARDS, AND PROFESSIONAL CONTACTS

World Health Organization:

www.who.int/occupational_health/en/

International Labour Organization:

www.ilo.org/global/lang-en/index.htm

International Agency for Research on Cancer: www.iarc.fr

International Commission on Occupational Health:

www.icohweb.org/site_new/ico_homepage.asp

International Occupational Hygiene Association: www.ioha.net/

International Network of Safety and Health Practitioner

Organisations: www.inshpo.org/index.php

Institution of Occupational Safety and Health: www.iosh.co.uk/

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety:

www.ccohs.ca

Health Canada: www.hc-sc.gc.ca

U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH): www.cdc.gov/NIOSH

American Industrial Hygiene Association: www.aiha.org

American Society of Safety Engineers: <http://asse.org>

U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA): www.osha.gov

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): www.epa.gov

USEFUL REFERENCES FOR CONSERVATORS

Prudent Practices in the Laboratory: Handling and Management of Chemical Hazards, Revised Edition (2011).

Free download at <http://dels.nas.edu/Report/Prudent-Practices-Laboratory-Handling/12654>

Arts, Crafts, and Theater Safety: www.artscraftstheatersafety.org

Report on Carcinogens: U.S. DHHS, National Toxicology Program: <http://ntp.niehs.nih.gov/?objectid=035E57E7-BDD9-2D9B-AFB9D1CAD8D09C1>

AIC Health and Safety Committee:

[HealthandSafety \[at\] conservation-us.org](mailto:HealthandSafety@conservation-us.org) and www.conservation-us.org/healthandsafety

Smithsonian Institution Safety Manual: www.ofeo.si.edu/safety_health/Safety_manual/safety_manual_toc.asp

Conclusion

The information gleaned from the papers presented at this symposium and communication between the AIC H&S Committee and international health and safety professionals have informed us of trends and new information in the field. Throughout the world, health and safety are of the utmost importance for a productive workplace, and this extends to all of us who work in museums and private conservation laboratories. Standards published by OSHA guide U.S. organizations such as museums to develop comprehensive safety plans to protect their employees. If these standards are not followed, the institution is held accountable through OSHA investigations and potential fines. However, OSHA does not have jurisdiction over those self-employed, and there are a few exemptions for small businesses with fewer than 11 employees, making many small conservation laboratories and museums vulnerable to unsafe work practices.

We encourage AIC's members to take responsibility for themselves and their coworkers, regardless of government oversight or lack thereof, and to pay attention to health and safety in their work practice. A comprehensive safety plan, and the different ways in which an individual can advocate to create a safe workplace, are similar in the museum community worldwide. Please participate in AIC's next Laboratory Safety for Conservation Course (beginning September 5) for a more practical approach to creating a laboratory safety plan of your own.

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REFERENCE

Smithsonian Institution Safety Manual. 2013. Chapter 3: Elements of a comprehensive safety, health and environmental management program. www.ofeo.si.edu/safety_health/Safety_manual/safety_manual_toc.asp

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The authors would like to thank AIC and FAIC for their support of our participation in this symposium.

AIC News

AIC Board Elections

The AIC Nominating Committee encourages members to submit nominations for qualified individuals as candidates for election to the following positions:

Secretary

Treasurer

Director, Professional Education

Director, Specialty Groups

The Nominating Committee must receive completed nominations by February 28, 2014, three months prior to the May Members Business Meeting in San Francisco, CA. The AIC Bylaws require that candidates for these positions be Fellows or

November 2013 IAG Meeting

The 2013 meeting of the Internal Advisory Group (IAG) will take place on Saturday, November 23, in Washington, DC. The Doubletree, located at 1525 Rhode Island Avenue, NW, is serving as the host hotel. Additional information will be provided in advance of the meeting date.

Professional Associates. The Nominees for all positions must be members in good standing of AIC and should have prior experience with the functioning of the organization through service on committees, task forces, specialty groups, or in other capacities.

Committee members will be pleased to discuss any aspect of the nominating and election process with potential candidates and anyone interested in nominating candidates. Please contact Glenn Wharton ([glenn.wharton \[at\] nyu.edu](mailto:glenn.wharton@nyu.edu)), Ellen Pearlstein ([epearl \[at\] ucla.edu](mailto:epearl@ucla.edu)), or Nancie Ravenel ([nravenel \[at\] shelburnemuseum.org](mailto:nravenel@shelburnemuseum.org)).

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The Nominating Committee is seeking nominations of qualified members as candidates for the Nominating Committee election to be held at the 2014 AIC Member Business Meeting. The committee, composed of three members each serving a three-year term, has one vacant position each year. The 2014 candidate must be a Fellow Member of AIC. Nominations may be made in writing to Pam Hatchfield ([phatchfield \[at\] mfa.org](mailto:phatchfield@mfa.org)), AIC Board President, or from the floor at the Business Meeting.

Club Quarters has New NYC location at Grand Central

AIC members have access to Club Quarters, full service hotels designed for business travelers that offer low fixed rates, for both business and personal travel. A new location in New York City is opening September 2013 across from Grand Central Station.

To book a room, visit www.clubquarters.com/MemberHome.php and log in using "AIC" as the password.

Annual Meeting News

AIC in the City by the Bay: AIC's 42nd Annual Meeting to be Held in San Francisco

Golden Gate Bridge. Tony Bennett's heart. Rice-A-Roni. What do all of these things have in common? They can be found in San Francisco, California, where AIC will be holding its next Annual Meeting!

We are making our way to the Golden Coast May 28-31, 2014, for our 42nd Annual Meeting. The theme for this meeting will be "Conscientious Conservation: Sustainable Choices in Collection Care." This year's meeting is being co-coordinated by AIC's Sustainability Committee and the new Collection Care Network. With the ever-changing role of the conservator in relation to new technology and practices, this year's theme coincides perfectly with the current global and economic climate. Don't miss out on a great meeting in a great city.