Dear Graduating Students,

Thank you for choosing occupational and environmental health and safety (OEHS) as a career. This is an exciting, and maybe even a bit scary point in your life. You might be wondering about the kind of position you should seek in this fast-growing field. I recently responded to a letter from a student who wrote about their passion for learning industrial hygiene and wondered what kind of job they should look for upon graduation. I want to share what I expressed in my reply with all of you.

Having a solid education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) topics such as chemistry, toxicology, ventilation, ergonomics, noise, and exposure assessment is very important and should be part of your curriculum or gained through AIHA webinars and publications. You may be obtaining a degree related to biology, chemistry, engineering, the environment, industrial hygiene, occupational safety, or public health. No doubt your school is a great one, so you’re already off to a solid start. There are so many job opportunities for early career OEHS professionals that it can be a bit daunting, so here are some suggestions.

Consider a primary goal of getting broad experience to start building your OEHS career. Look for a position where you can get hands-on, “boots on the ground” field experience with a variety of hazards under the guidance of an experienced OEHS professional or an experienced health and/or safety manager. The main thing is to have a guide or mentor, so you aren’t trying to go it alone (I learned that hard lesson with my first job out of school!). Check out the AIHA Mentoring Institute¹, where you can be matched with a mentor who can give you even more specific guidance.

In general, with OEHS jobs, you could go three different routes: government (or government contractor), corporate, or consulting. For government, start looking at USAjobs.gov. As an example, a job as an OSHA Compliance Officer is great for seeing a broad range of hazards. Another example is the many opportunities that exist within the Department of Energy (DOE) (e.g., national labs run by contractors) at DOE.gov or at specific DOE websites such as lanl.gov. I spent a large part of my career as a government contractor at a DOE/National Nuclear Security Administration National Laboratory, and I know there are great opportunities there.

¹ https://www.aiha.org/get-involved/mentoring-program
Larger corporations have great OEHS teams that could support you as you get that practical experience. Many of our AIHA members have great programs in a variety of companies and are always looking for early career professionals. OEHS consulting firms can also guide and mentor you while showing you first-hand what it is to provide worker protection for companies not big enough to have an IH on staff. Many experienced corporate and consulting IHs are AIHA members actively participating in volunteer opportunities, so joining one of our many volunteer groups will help establish your network and give you information on a topic (or a company) that you want to know more about.

Keep AIHA in your back pocket. Check out the AIHA Career Center² and look under “Job Seekers” for currently posted jobs. The site also has all sorts of tips for job seekers as well! AIHA staff and volunteers are constantly working on our products and services, all to help future practitioners like you. I’m guessing you already know about the student and early career professional support available through AIHA. If you’re not already a member, please join (only $10 per month for early career professionals) at https://www.aiha.org/membership/join-aiha. AIHA knows that students like you are the future of our profession. We know it’s critical that you start your career with support, encouragement, and guidance. This support is available from all our members performing volunteer work on the AIHA Board, our technical committees and working groups, and through the Mentoring Institute.

Wishing you success and a warm welcome to this rewarding career.

Sincerely,

Dina M. Siegel, CIH, CSP, CBSP, FAIHA
President, 2023 – 2024
AIHA

About AIHA
AIHA is the association for scientists and professionals committed to preserving and ensuring occupational and environmental health and safety in the workplace and community. Founded in 1939, we support our members with our expertise, networks, comprehensive education programs, and other products and services that help them maintain the highest professional and competency standards. More than half of AIHA’s nearly 8,500 members are Certified Industrial Hygienists, and many hold other professional designations. AIHA serves as a resource for those employed across the public and private sectors as well as to the communities in which they work. For more information, please visit www.aiha.org.

² https://careeradvantage.aiha.org/