



HEALTHIER WORKPLACES | A HEALTHIER WORLD

Strengthening the Occupational and Environmental Health and Safety Pipeline Policy Document

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The Challenge and Need for Action

The Shortage of OEHS Professionals

The American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) and other stakeholders have observed a worrisome trend: not enough new professionals are entering the occupational and environmental health and safety (OEHS) field to replace retiring specialists or meet growing demand for their skills. This talent gap is reaching a critical point. OEHS roles, including those in industrial hygiene, occupational health, environmental health, and safety, are essential for identifying and controlling hazards that can cause injury, illness, or death to workers. When workplaces lack OEHS expertise, hazards often go unnoticed or unmanaged until incidents occur. In essence, a shortage of OEHS professionals translates directly to heightened risks for workers and the public. Businesses, schools, hospitals, and government agencies all face complex health and safety challenges, from chemical exposures and dangerous machinery to poor indoor air quality and infectious diseases. If there are too few experts to guide risk management, the likelihood increases that accidents, occupational diseases, and environmental health crises will occur.

AIHA is sounding the alarm before the shortage becomes a crisis. We know from experience that effective occupational health and safety programs save lives and improve communities. Each industrial hygienist or safety specialist who enters the workforce prevents countless injuries and illnesses over their career. Conversely, each unfilled OEHS position leaves a gap that allows hazards to go unmitigated. During the COVID-19 pandemic, workplaces with dedicated OEHS professionals were better equipped to implement ventilation improvements, personal protective equipment programs, and exposure controls. Organizations without this guidance often struggled and may have unintentionally endangered employees and the public. AIHA Treasurer-Elect Nancy McClellan, MPH, CIH, CHMM, has observed that the pandemic increased awareness of OEHS needs but also worsened the shortage of qualified industrial hygienists worldwide, as demand for personnel spiked in a field that was already under-resourced (Malmstrom, 2021).

The Impact on Worker and Community Safety

The stakes for addressing this gap are high. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (n.d.) has reported that in 2023, 5,283 people in the U.S. died from hazardous workplace exposures or incidents and that more than 2.5 million nonfatal injuries and illnesses occurred. These illnesses, injuries, and fatalities included those caused by sudden tragedies, such as fatal accidents or chemical releases, as well as chronic conditions, such as noise-induced hearing loss and cancers or lung diseases resulting from toxic exposures. These outcomes are preventable with proper controls, but prevention requires expertise. OEHS professionals are trained to anticipate and recognize hazards—whether physical, chemical, biological, or ergonomic—and design effective interventions.

When OEHS professionals are in short supply, even well-intentioned employers may overlook critical health and safety risks. A lack of OEHS personnel means fewer inspections, less training for workers, and delayed responses to emerging threats. This gap is especially perilous in high-hazard industries, such as construction, mining, manufacturing, and health care, and other situations requiring quick action by health and safety experts, such as disaster response. In short, a robust OEHS profession is a frontline defense for workers' lives and community well-being.

A Hidden Profession

Why is a field as impactful as OEHS facing a shortage of incoming professionals? A core reason is that most people are not familiar with OEHS as a profession at all. The term “industrial hygiene” is often misunderstood. Whereas many laypeople believe the term refers to cleaning industrial facilities or people’s teeth, it actually involves preventing harm caused by workplace exposures. High school and college students who are interested in science or public health seldom hear that this career path is open to them. Guidance counselors, teachers, and even university faculty may not know to mention OEHS alongside more commonly discussed careers.

This lack of visibility creates a domino effect. If young people don’t enter the pipeline, employers perceive a talent shortage. If employers don’t perceive that talent is available or don’t understand its value, they may not create OEHS positions, which further obscures the profession. Many organizations, especially small businesses, employ only one safety officer or none at all, reinforcing the false notion that specialized health and safety expertise is optional. AIHA’s assessment is that lack of awareness is the single greatest barrier to entry to the OEHS field and that overcoming this barrier is the first critical step to enlarging the profession.

Demand-Side Challenges

Parallel economic and policy factors suppress demand for OEHS professionals, contributing to the shortage. While forward-thinking organizations proactively hire OEHS staff or consultants to keep their people safe, others, particularly smaller enterprises, may be unable or unwilling to pay for professional OEHS services unless compelled by regulations or an incident.

Occupational health hazards, like cumulative chemical exposures or repetitive strain injuries, often develop over time. Because the cause-and-effect relationship between the absence of OEHS professionals and the prevalence of occupational illnesses or injuries can be subtle

or delayed, some business leaders underestimate the need for preventative action. With hazards that are invisible or require technical knowledge to address, such as airborne contaminants or noise levels, non-specialists may not recognize the risk until damage is already done. This can lead to the dangerous assumption that the workplace is “safe enough” and that hiring an industrial hygienist or safety expert would be an unnecessary expense.

If employers and the public undervalue OEHS expertise, policymakers are likewise less inclined to prioritize laws and funding to support it. The result is a self-perpetuating cycle: low demand leads to fewer job openings and opportunities, which deters students from entering the field, further reducing the supply of qualified professionals. Breaking this cycle requires demonstrating the return on investment and social good of OEHS—in other words, making its value visible.

Educational and Structural Barriers

People who are interested in OEHS careers can face practical hurdles to entering the field. One issue is the limited number of academic programs and training opportunities. While some universities offer degrees in industrial hygiene, occupational health, or safety, these programs are not ubiquitous. Entire regions of the country may have few or no programs, requiring students to relocate or enroll in long-distance learning. For many would-be OEHS professionals, including working adults looking to change careers or military veterans transitioning to civilian lives, the traditional four-year degree pathway into OEHS may not be accessible or appealing. Alternative pathways exist, such as through technician-level jobs or two-year associate degrees in environmental technology or safety, but they are not standardized or widely advertised as stepping stones into OEHS.

Furthermore, the financial cost of higher education and professional certification can be significant. In AIHA’s 2022 market research survey of community college students and technical workers in relevant fields, 33% of respondents reported that the high cost of obtaining additional training or education was a major barrier to their career advancement in safety or health roles. About 25% also cited a lack of formal education or limited career advancement opportunities as obstacles, indicating that people need clearer, better supported pathways to move from entry-level roles into professional OEHS positions (Sloan, 2023). These findings underscore that there is a large pool of potential OEHS practitioners who need structured opportunities, affordable training, and clearer signals regarding how to progress in the profession.

Equity and Access

Underserved rural and urban communities often lack educational resources in occupational health and employers that prioritize safety, resulting in fewer professional role models and opportunities. This not only limits the population that enters the field but can also leave those communities with less OEHS support—a double impact of disparity. For example, high schools in wealthier districts might offer advanced science electives or internships that could spark a student’s interest in industrial hygiene, whereas under-resourced schools focus on meeting basic curriculum standards and may never introduce students to the concept of an OEHS career.

Language and cultural barriers can play a role. Members of non-English-speaking and immigrant communities, who frequently must undertake hazardous jobs, are underrepresented in the OEHS profession. Expanding the OEHS workforce, therefore, also means reaching a more diverse audience and ensuring that OEHS materials and programs are accessible to all. AIHA believes that inclusion and diversity efforts will not only enlarge the candidate pool but also increase trust and bring critical perspectives to protecting vulnerable worker populations.

The School Infrastructure Connection

AIHA has identified a unique facet of the OEHS workforce problem in the condition of our nation's school buildings. Schools are where the next generation of potential OEHS professionals is currently learning and forming ideas about careers, as well as where millions of teachers and staff work. The environmental, health, and safety conditions in schools send a powerful implicit message about the importance of OEHS.

Unfortunately, many U.S. schools are in poor condition and rife with the hazards OEHS professionals tackle. The average public school building is more than 50 years old and was built in 1968 (Filardo, 2021), when materials such as asbestos, lead-based paint, and electrical equipment containing polychlorinated biphenyl were common. Aging infrastructure means many schools have leaking roofs, outdated ventilation, mold problems, and other issues that can negatively impact students' learning and health. The Government Accountability Office (2020) found that 41% of school districts need to update or replace heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems in at least half of their schools, which translates to approximately 36,000 schools nationwide. These environmental deficits in schools pose health risks, such as poor indoor air quality and extreme temperatures, and exemplify a broader lack of awareness of OEHS principles in the community.

If students and educators frequently encounter hazards such as uncomfortable heat, poor air quality, or unsafe lab materials without proper controls, and no one is visibly addressing these issues, it reinforces the notion that health and safety risks are just part of life. Conversely, engaging with OEHS professionals to improve school conditions not only protects students and staff but can show students the practical value of this career field. AIHA views the improvement of school environments as both a public health imperative and a strategic opportunity to demonstrate the value of OEHS work to young people by essentially turning schools into classrooms for health and safety science.

A Looming Crisis

In summary, the shortage of new OEHS professionals is a multifaceted challenge: it stems from low awareness and undervaluation of the profession, educational and financial barriers to entry, and systemic factors that suppress demand. The shortage, if not addressed, will exacerbate workplace injuries and illnesses and leave critical safety roles unfilled in the coming decade. This is not merely a workforce issue—it is a public health issue. To tackle it, we must encourage more individuals to enter the pipeline through outreach, education, and incentives, and support them by creating a strong job market and network for OEHS careers. The next section of this paper outlines solutions and policy actions that, taken together, can expand and strengthen the OEHS professional pathway from early education through career development.

Policy Recommendations and Actions

Addressing the OEHS workforce shortage requires a comprehensive strategy spanning programs for awareness, education, workforce development, and policy support at multiple levels of government and industry. AIHA's recommendations focus on creating a sustainable OEHS career pathway through sparking students' initial interest, training and recruiting new professionals straight from university or after career transitions, and supporting professionals throughout their careers so that they remain and grow in the field. The following is a detailed list of recommended actions. They are directed to a variety of stakeholders—policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels, educational institutions, employers, and OEHS professionals themselves—because true progress will require coordinated effort. While it may not be feasible to implement every recommendation immediately, even incremental progress on several fronts will make a difference. Collectively, these actions will help fill and sustain the OEHS pipeline, ensuring that workers and communities will be protected by a new generation of qualified professionals.

1. Build Awareness of OEHS Careers Among Students and the Public

Integrate OEHS into Education

AIHA urges policymakers and school systems to incorporate occupational and environmental health and safety topics into K-12 curricula and extracurricular programs. For example, state education boards could include basic workplace health concepts in science standards or encourage science fair projects on topics such as air quality, noise, or ergonomics. At the federal level, Congress and the Department of Education should support grant programs that allow schools, especially high schools, to develop OEHS modules in biology, chemistry, or technical education classes. Introducing students to concepts such as exposure monitoring or hazard control can spark early interest in OEHS careers. All students everywhere, regardless of their zip codes, should have access to high-quality science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) [AR1.1]courses, and within these courses, real-world applications such as OEHS can be highlighted. AIHA supports novel, hands-on approaches, such as school lab activities that require students to measure noise levels in their cafeteria or assess ventilation by measuring carbon dioxide levels in their classroom. These learning opportunities would not only educate students about hazards but also position the OEHS profession as an exciting and impactful career choice for scientifically inclined students.

Expand Career Outreach and Guidance

The association recommends undertaking a concerted outreach campaign to educate school counselors, teachers, and parents about OEHS careers. Many guidance counselors have never heard of industrial hygiene or allied fields. Providing them with informational materials, such as brochures, videos, and presentations, will enable them to guide interested students toward relevant college programs or internships. The AIHA IH/OH Professional Pathway (n.d.a) is one resource that illustrates progress through OEHS roles from technician to senior industrial hygienist. Making this resource visible in schools and career centers can help students imagine a future in OEHS. Additionally, state and local workforce boards can include OEHS in youth career exploration initiatives. Public awareness campaigns, such as short public service announcements, social media content, or National Safety Month messages, can raise the profile of the OEHS profession. Given the relative obscurity of the OEHS field, even modest media exposure can have an impact on awareness.

Recognize Workplace Health and Safety Week

To elevate the national profile of the profession, AIHA encourages federal and state officials to formally recognize a week for workplace health and safety each year. Modeled after successful initiatives such as Engineers Week, which celebrates people in engineering careers, this Workplace Health and Safety Week would celebrate the contributions of OEHS professionals and provide time for focused outreach. During this week, schools could invite guest speakers, companies could hold safety days, and government agencies could showcase their health and safety programs. A resolution in Congress or proclamation by a state governor could establish this observance. The key is to create an annual event to spotlight the importance of protecting worker health and, by extension, those who make it their careers to do so.

Engage Non-Traditional Career Pathways and “Hidden” Talent Pools

Building awareness of OEHS shouldn't stop with school-age students. There are many adults working in adjacent fields who would consider transitioning into OEHS if they were aware of the opportunity. Military service members and veterans are one such group, since they often receive safety training and value mission-focused work. AIHA recommends partnering with the armed forces and veterans' organizations to promote OEHS training and certification for those retiring from military service. This will not only help veterans find rewarding post-military careers but also infuse the OEHS field with disciplined, experienced individuals.

Similarly, outreach to workers in trades and technical roles, such as chemical plant technicians, construction foremen, and laboratory technicians, can highlight OEHS careers as their next step. These individuals already speak the language of safety and could, with additional education, become industrial hygienists or safety managers. As AIHA CEO Larry Sloan (2023) noted, the OEHS field must appeal to “the thousands of technicians working in a broad range of industries who may be interested in a career change or want to build upon their existing skills” (para. 5). By broadening OEHS awareness campaigns to target technical colleges, trade unions, and industry associations, we can tap into this neglected source of future OEHS professionals.

Leverage Outreach by OEHS Professionals

Practicing OEHS professionals have a responsibility to pay it forward by raising the field's visibility. In 2016, AIHA launched the “I Am IH” initiative, which encouraged members to volunteer in schools to talk about what they do. Personal interactions, such as an industrial hygienist demonstrating use of a sound level meter or a safety scientist showing an audience how to detect gas, helped ignite students' curiosity. We recommend expanding support for these volunteer efforts by developing presentation kits, talking points, and age-appropriate activity guides that any OEHS professional may use when visiting a classroom or career fair.

This initiative remains a key priority for the association and is in the process of being rebranded. AIHA will continue to mobilize local sections to set up school visits. Policymakers and school administrators can help by facilitating connections between schools and OEHS practitioners. For instance, a state labor department could coordinate a speaker's bureau on safety careers for high school students. Mentorship and outreach by current OEHS professionals are some of the most powerful tools for inspiring the next generation and have

the added benefit of energizing the existing workforce with a sense of purpose and pride in their profession.

2. Expand OEHS Education, Training, and Certification Pathways

Support OEHS Degree Programs and University Resources

Government at the federal and state levels should invest in academic programs that produce OEHS professionals. Sustained and predictable funding is especially critical as of 2025, when proposed cuts to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) threaten the stability of longstanding OEHS workforce development pipelines. It is essential to maintain robust funding for NIOSH's Education and Research Centers (ERCs), which are university-based centers of excellence that train graduate-level OEHS practitioners and researchers. As of March 2025, there were 18 ERCs across the U.S. Continued funding would not only allow them to remain open but also possibly expand to underserved regions. Likewise, OSHA grant programs, such as the Susan Harwood Training Grant Program, play a vital role in equipping workers and employers with life-saving knowledge. These programs should be protected and strengthened rather than reduced.

Complementary efforts, such as curriculum development supported by National Science Foundation grants, can further enrich OEHS training in higher education. State legislatures and governors can incentivize public universities to establish or grow programs in industrial hygiene, occupational health nursing, safety management, and related fields, such as through targeted funding or by including these fields in state scholarship programs for high-need occupations. Tuition assistance and scholarships specific to OEHS should be expanded through federal STEAM scholarships or partnerships with industry. AIHA, through the American Industrial Hygiene Foundation, provides scholarships to OEHS students, and we encourage further philanthropic and public support for such initiatives. The goal is to reduce financial barriers and attract high-caliber students to OEHS degree tracks by making it a financially viable choice.

Develop Technician and Associate Degree Pathways

Not every OEHS professional enters the field with a four-year degree, nor is one always necessary. We recommend strengthening sub-baccalaureate career pathways, such as one-year certificates or two-year associate degrees in occupational safety, environmental technology, or industrial hygiene technology. Community colleges, which often serve diverse and local student populations, are key venues for this. State education departments and community college boards should consider developing standardized OEHS technician programs, possibly in consultation with NIOSH or professional bodies to ensure quality and relevance. These programs can prepare graduates for OEHS generalist or technician roles in industry or government, where they might work under the guidance of senior staff. Importantly, these one- or two-year programs should link to higher degrees. Credits might transfer toward a bachelor's in OEHS, providing a stackable credential model. This flexibility would allow someone to enter the workforce quickly and continue their education while working.

Expanding the cadre of OEHS generalists and technicians, who have high school or two-year degrees and specialized training, is a pragmatic way to increase the number of people in workplaces with OEHS knowledge, especially in settings with limited resources. Such

practitioners can handle many routine monitoring and training tasks, multiplying the impact of available professionals. AIHA supports efforts to formalize these roles, including through apprenticeship programs.

Launch and Promote OEHS Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship, which combines on-the-job training with classroom instruction, is an ideal model for integrating people into the OEHS workforce, particularly those who are not enrolled in traditional degree programs. AIHA recommends that the Department of Labor, in partnership with industry, establish registered apprenticeship programs for occupational safety and industrial hygiene technicians. These could target young adults or workers looking to acquire more advanced skills. Already, a few pilot programs exist—for example, some companies have safety technician apprenticeships. Scaling these programs nationally would create a structured pipeline of talent.

Apprentices could work in the public sector or in industries such as construction or manufacturing, learning under experienced mentors and taking relevant coursework, which could be delivered online or through community colleges. We support the development and strengthening of OEHS apprenticeship programs, including those involving high school or college students. High school apprenticeships or co-op programs could let students earn credit while working part-time in a safety office or performing basic industrial hygiene sampling, providing them with early OEHS exposure and real-world experience. Government incentives, such as tax credits for employers who hire apprentices or direct DOL grant funding for apprenticeship programs, would encourage uptake. By formalizing apprenticeship pathways, we send the message that OEHS is a trade and profession worth learning in a hands-on way, just like an electrician, lab technician, or other skilled role.

Embed Safety Training in School and College Experiences

Another avenue of enlarging the OEHS pipeline is by ensuring that students commonly acquire basic OEHS training as part of their general education. For instance, OSHA 10-hour and 30-hour training courses that cover fundamental safety and health practices should be made widely available to students and young workers. AIHA supports legislation or programs that allow secondary school students to earn credit toward high school graduation by completing OSHA 10- or 30-hour training. Some states have already implemented these programs within career-tech curricula. They would not only raise the safety competence of young workers but also introduce them to concepts that might spark further interest.

Similarly, we advocate for programs that allow high school students to earn college credits in OEHS subjects, such as introduction to occupational health electives offered as dual-enrollment courses with local colleges. At the college level, even students not majoring in OEHS should have opportunities to learn about it. We recommend that universities incorporate basic OEHS principles into engineering, chemistry, public health, and business programs—after all, tomorrow's managers and engineers will be making decisions affecting workplace safety. An elective or module on occupational health may plant the seeds for students to pursue OEHS as a career, or at a minimum, create more safety-conscious leaders in other fields.

Maintain and Expand NIOSH Training Programs

NIOSH ERCs and related training project grants have been cornerstones in educating advanced OEHS professionals by granting master's degrees and doctorates in occupational health for decades. These programs need not only to be maintained but also adapted to current needs. AIHA calls on Congress to continue robust funding for NIOSH ERCs. NIOSH should consider focusing on recruitment strategies to attract more students to these programs, especially those from underrepresented regions or backgrounds.

Additionally, NIOSH Training Program Grants (TPGs) support some undergraduate and specialty training in occupational safety and health. TPGs should be expanded to support new programs at institutions that serve minority groups and in states without ERCs. Federal support for OEHS education is a high-yield investment, as graduates often fill critical roles in industry, academia, and government. In parallel, AIHA encourages private scholarships and internship agreements with universities. Companies could sponsor students in exchange for work commitments, ensuring a pipeline of talent for themselves while strengthening the OEHS field overall. We also support modernizing curricula to include emerging topics, such as infectious disease control, climate change resilience, and Total Worker Health®, to keep the profession relevant to future challenges.

Support Certification and Continuing Education

Professional certifications such as the Certified Industrial Hygienist and Certified Safety Professional credentials, as well as continuing education, are as vital as formal education for a strong workforce. We encourage employers and government agencies to support their employees in obtaining and maintaining these credentials by funding exam fees or providing work time for study. Policymakers can assist by recognizing these certifications in regulations and job classifications that elevate their importance. For example, a state could require that certain industries consult with a certified professional for exposure assessments, thereby creating demand.

AIHA and other organizations provide accessible continuing education, including through online courses, conferences, and webinars, to ensure practitioners keep their skills up to date and advance from technician to professional levels. Lifelong learning must be a hallmark of the OEHS career path, and removing barriers, such as cost, geography, and time, will help retain talent.

3. Strengthen Demand for OEHS Expertise

Incentivize Proactive Health and Safety Programs

Government policies should reward employers who implement strong health and safety programs and, implicitly, those who employ qualified safety and health staff. OSHA's Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP) are one successful example. VPP sites, which typically have dedicated safety personnel and recognition for their exceptional programs, are exempted from certain routine inspections, since their injury rates are well below average. We recommend expanding the promotion of VPP and similar recognition programs, as well as lowering barriers to entry for small businesses to participate.

Workers' compensation insurers and state insurance funds may also offer premium discounts to firms that hire OEHS professionals or achieve certain safety benchmarks, leveraging market forces to drive demand for expertise. Equity in protection should be

emphasized. Every worker deserves adequate health and safety support, whether they work in a large corporation or a small shop. Encouraging businesses to address hazards equitably for all workers, regardless of their race, gender, or job type, may be tied to hiring practitioners who systematically ensure that no group is overlooked.

Boost Use of No-Cost Consultation Services

One way to immediately extend OEHS expertise to businesses that lack it is through the OSHA On-Site Consultation Program, which offers free, confidential safety and industrial hygiene consultations to small and medium-sized employers. AIHA recommends increasing awareness and usage of this program among employers, since many still do not know it exists. Government at the state and federal levels can promote the On-Site Consultation Program through chambers of commerce, small business development centers, and trade associations.

We also support increased funding for the OSHA On-Site Consultation Program so that its staff, who are often OEHS professionals themselves, can reach more workplaces.

Currently, despite the program's prioritization of high-hazard industries, consultation visits often have waiting lists due to limited resources. By encouraging greater use of the OSHA On-Site Consultation Program and expanding its reach, we would effectively place more OEHS experts in workplaces to identify problems and mentor employers on solutions. This not only would protect workers directly but also demonstrate to businesses the value of retaining OEHS expertise, potentially leading them to create full-time roles or hire long-term consultants, creating jobs in the private sector for OEHS professionals.

Advocate for OSHA and MSHA Staffing

OSHA and the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) play critical roles in regulatory enforcement and guidance. Both agencies face staffing challenges and have seen declines in their numbers of inspectors over the past decades. AIHA supports budget allocations that would allow OSHA and MSHA to hire additional inspectors and technical personnel, many of whom would be industrial hygienists or safety professionals. When federal OSHA or state OSHA programs hire more staff, they directly employ more OEHS professionals and indirectly create a culture in which businesses expect to interact with these experts. Adequate agency staffing also means more robust oversight, which stimulates demand for companies to seek out compliance assistance, often provided by OEHS professionals.

We advocate for federal agencies to modernize their hiring practices and job classifications to attract young OEHS talent, such as by offering bonuses to new hires with relevant master's degrees or permitting more entry-level trainee positions that lead to permanent jobs. Policymakers in Congress can support these measures through appropriations and oversight.

Support Legislation to Mandate or Encourage OEHS Positions

In certain high-risk workplaces or institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and public safety departments, legislation could mandate or strongly encourage the presence of qualified health and safety officers. For example, some states have laws requiring public school districts to have asbestos management plans and people appointed to implement them. This concept could be expanded to a school safety and health officer or task force

responsible for OEHS issues at each school. AIHA recommends that state legislatures require school districts to establish environmental health and safety committees that meet regularly and advise on facility conditions, with participation from staff and experts. Similarly, laws or regulations could require construction projects above a certain size to employ safety professionals or chemical facilities to retain industrial hygienists to oversee exposure monitoring. Although we recognize that small enterprises cannot always support full-time OEHS specialists, policies could facilitate creative approaches, such as the sharing of services across business coalitions or roving safety officers funded by industry associations. The overarching idea is to formalize the expectation that complex hazards warrant professional oversight.

Cultivate Private Sector Engagement and Investment

AIHA calls on private employers and industry groups to be part of the solution. Companies should be encouraged to invest in OEHS internships and co-op programs for students and to support universities through endowments or equipment donations. Large corporations can partner with community colleges or vocational schools to create feeder programs for safety technicians. The private sector will ultimately benefit from a deeper pool of health and safety talent, as OEHS professionals reduce risks and potential liabilities. We suggest that business roundtables and trade associations make OEHS workforce development a strategic priority, similar to how tech companies support computer science education or healthcare companies support nursing programs. By championing OEHS careers in their community engagements, such as by sponsoring industrial hygiene challenges in science fairs or funding scholarships for minoritized students in safety, businesses can elevate the profession's profile and directly contribute to the growth of the OEHS pipeline.

4. Improve School Infrastructure

Increase Federal and State Funding for School Facilities

Many of the hazards in schools result from deferred maintenance and outdated building systems. We strongly support legislation such as the proposed Rebuild America's Schools Act of 2023, which would direct federal funding to modernize facilities in underserved school districts. AIHA urges Congress to enact this legislation and appropriate funds to help school districts tackle issues such as failing HVAC systems, mold, lead in water, and structural hazards. The Biden-Harris Administration's Action Plan for Building Better School Infrastructure [AR1.1]outlined administrative steps to support schools in improving environmental quality, an aim that AIHA fully supports.

At the state level, we recommend increasing capital improvement grants to school districts or allowing them to access state-level infrastructure funds. Ensuring that every child's school meets basic health and safety standards is foundational. It also underscores the message that society values healthy environments and reinforces the importance of OEHS.

Establish OEHS Leadership in Education Departments

We advocate for the creation of dedicated roles or teams focused on occupational and environmental health in educational settings. At the federal level, an Office of School Infrastructure and Sustainability within the Department of Education would provide necessary leadership. This office could coordinate research on the health of school environments, develop best practice resources, and liaise with agencies such as NIOSH,

the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Energy on cross-cutting issues, such as indoor air quality and energy efficiency in schools. It would convey to school districts the existence of a hub for guidance and funding opportunities.

Similarly, state education departments could designate school health and safety coordinators. Each school district is encouraged to form an OEHS task force or committee that includes facility managers, school nurses, teachers, parents, and local OEHS experts, such as consultants or even parents who are industrial hygienists. The task force's mandate would be to identify hazards, prioritize remediation, develop emergency plans, and promote a safe school culture. By institutionalizing these structures, we would infuse the education system with OEHS principles and create new roles and opportunities for professionals in educational OEHS.

Reinstate the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities

The National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities formerly provided a repository of information on school design, maintenance, and health, but this agency was defunded in 2010. AIHA recommends that the clearinghouse be reestablished under the National Institute of Building Sciences or another federal agency, or possibly as a public-private partnership.[AR1.1] It would collect and disseminate data on conditions in school facilities, case studies for improvements, and guidance on hazard control in schools, such as safe chemistry labs, effective ventilation standards, and noise control in cafeterias. This would indirectly support the OEHS workforce by spreading technical knowledge and provide a channel through which professionals and students could access real-world problems for research or projects.

Promote Comprehensive School Inspections and Hazard Mitigation

We support policies requiring all schools to undergo regular, comprehensive, and ideally annual safety and health inspections to catch hazards before they become severe. These inspections should cover not only fire code or structural issues but the full range of OEHS concerns, such as indoor air quality, the presence of toxins, noise levels, and temperature stress conditions. Legislation or regulations could require reports of school conditions to be made public, similar to school report cards. While this may place an initial burden on school districts, it would create both transparency and accountability. It would also generate work that would likely engage OEHS professionals as inspectors or consultants helping to rectify identified issues.

Federal grants to states, potentially through NIOSH or EPA, would help implement training for school facility inspectors. In fact, the Department of Education could induce, via rules or incentives, states receiving federal funds to ensure their districts conduct annual health and safety audits. The data from these inspections would highlight needs that must be addressed—for example, the number of schools still requiring asbestos remediation—and inform workforce development by indicating where experts are needed.

Use School Improvements to Promote OEHS Careers

Lastly, as school environments are improved and hazards are addressed, it will be crucial to highlight the role of OEHS professionals in those successes. For instance, if a school

district undertakes an indoor air quality initiative and dramatically reduces student asthma incidents, the key role played by OEHS professionals in this effort should be publicized. AIHA can assist these efforts by providing success stories and press releases to the media. The narrative we want to promote is that schools are safer and healthier thanks to the work of OEHS professionals, and that students, teachers, or parents can become OEHS professionals in the future. This positive visibility would help sustain the OEHS pipeline by making tangible the impact one can make in this career.

5. Engage the OEHS Professional Community in Mentorship and Retention

Even as we focus on bringing new people into OEHS, we must not lose sight of the need to retain experienced professionals and ensure their careers are fulfilling. The OEHS community has a duty to support newcomers and established professionals. AIHA is committed to fostering mentorship, professional development, and an inclusive culture in the profession. We call on private employers and government agencies to value and empower their health and safety staff so that they can flourish and advance rather than feel frustrated or stagnant.

Expand Mentorship Programs

By mentoring students and early-career colleagues, experienced OEHS professionals can increase the field's retention and growth. Many AIHA local sections and companies offer informal mentorship, but we encourage them to formalize these efforts. To support this goal, AIHA will promote and expand its Mentoring Institute.

Furthermore, we encourage universities to connect students with mentors in the field. Employers can institute mentorship by pairing new hires with senior staff for their first year of work, assigning them a go-to person for guidance. Federal agencies, such as OSHA and NIOSH, as well as state health departments, should also offer mentorship or buddy systems for new inspectors or hygienists to improve their job satisfaction and the transfer of institutional knowledge. Mentors not only help individuals navigate the OEHS profession but also impart the passion and ethics that keep our field strong.

Establish Professional Networks and Communities of Practice

We advise creating opportunities for new OEHS professionals to join networks, such as AIHA's volunteer groups and local sections or industry-specific safety forums. A sense of community helps retain people in the field. Federal agencies and large employers can sponsor their junior staff to attend conferences or workshops, such as AIHA Connect, AIHA's annual conference, which would broaden their perspectives and commitment. Likewise, the inclusion of early-career OEHS professionals in standards committees or collaborative projects could motivate them to remain in the field. AIHA will continue to emphasize the inclusion of students and early-career professionals in leadership roles in the association's technical committees and local sections, giving them a voice and a stake in the profession's future.

Clarify Career Pathways and Advancement

It is important to establish a clear career progression, like that envisioned in the AIHA IH/OH Professional Pathway (n.d.a), so that new entrants to the OEHS profession can see a future for themselves. Employers should delineate how a technician can become a specialist, then a manager, and so on, with corresponding increases in responsibility and compensation.

Recognizing and celebrating the milestones achieved by staff at intermediate career levels, such as occupational health and safety technologists or associate safety professionals, will encourage them to continue advancing rather than leaving for other fields. For example, a company might create a tiered hierarchy of safety roles, or a health department might have three levels of industrial hygiene roles tied to increasing experience and certification. AIHA supports initiatives to create more technician-level positions and encourages those workers to pursue further credentials, as these stepping stones to more advanced roles also immediately alleviate shortfalls in the OEHS workforce.

Improve Workplace Support and Recognition

Finally, retaining OEHS professionals means ensuring that they are valued in their workplaces. Policymakers and leaders can set the tone by acknowledging the contributions of health and safety personnel in public communications and internal awards. Employers are encouraged to highlight OEHS metrics in overall organizational success, thereby demonstrating that the work of safety and health staff directly ties into the organization's mission. For instance, evaluating managers' safety performance would signal that safety officers' efforts matter to the company's goals. An organizational culture that prioritizes health and safety not only protects workers but also affirms the importance of the OEHS professionals who oversee that culture.

Conclusion: A Call to Action

The United States can ill afford a shortage of OEHS professionals at a time when workplace and environmental hazards are evolving and, in some cases, intensifying. Our vision is a future with a vibrant, well-staffed OEHS workforce that can protect workers in every sector, respond to public health emergencies, guide companies toward prevention-focused safety cultures, and safeguard schools and communities. Achieving this vision requires making strategic investments today in the people who will carry out this mission tomorrow.

This policy position paper has outlined the critical issues and practical solutions surrounding workforce development in OEHS. AIHA is committed to leading and collaborating on these efforts. But success will only come with broad engagement from interests ranging from federal legislators to local school boards, corporate executives, school science teachers, current OEHS experts, and the students who will become future OEHS colleagues.

We have reasons to be optimistic. There is growing recognition of the importance of health and safety, spurred, in part, by global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. Despite the challenges of the changing U.S. political landscape, there is still need to invest in infrastructure and education, presenting opportunities to discuss OEHS in those conversations. If we implement the recommendations in this paper, we can begin to reverse the shortage of OEHS talent. We can introduce the possibility of an OEHS career to thousands of young people who desire to make a difference. We can remove barriers and smooth their pathway into the profession. And we can ensure that once they are in the field, they have the support and encouragement to remain and excel in it.

AIHA calls on policymakers to enact the legislative and funding initiatives described previously, such as supporting STEAM education that includes OEHS content, passing bills that fund healthier schools, and bolstering NIOSH and OSHA programs that build OEHS workforce capacity. We call on educators and administrators to welcome partnerships

that bring safety and health into school curricula and to champion facility improvements that double as educational opportunities. We urge employers and industry leaders to treat workforce development in OEHS as an investment in their own sustainability by hiring interns, supporting OEHS training, and valuing the professionals who keep their operations safe. And we invite our fellow OEHS professionals to step up as ambassadors and mentors in the knowledge that inspiring even one young person can ripple outward to benefit countless others in the future.

The challenge is substantial, but the cost of inaction is far greater and will be measured in preventable injuries, illnesses, and lives disrupted or lost. Conversely, the benefits of a stronger OEHS workforce will be felt in every sector of the economy and every community: more jobs and career opportunities, healthier workplaces, greater productivity, and reduced burden on health systems. Empowering the professionals who protect others creates a positive feedback loop of safety, health, and economic vitality.

Now is the time to act. The pipeline of OEHS professionals must be not only preserved but expanded to meet tomorrow's workforce needs. With collaboration and commitment, we can build a diverse, knowledgeable, and passionate workforce dedicated to the principle that everyone has the right to a healthy and safe environment on the job, at school, and in their community.

AIHA is ready to work with all partners in making the recommendations of this paper a reality. Regarding policymakers, we welcome the opportunity to discuss these recommendations and provide any technical assistance in crafting policies. Regarding AIHA members and OEHS professionals, we ask them to consider how they may contribute, whether by volunteering for outreach, mentoring students, or advocating for the issues listed previously in their organizations or professional networks. Please contact **AIHA's government relations department** (GR@aiha.org) for more information, to share ideas, or to join our advocacy efforts.

Together, we can ensure that the OEHS professional pathway is strong, continuous, accessible, and ready to meet current and future challenges with a robust workforce of qualified professionals.

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Executive Summary: Strengthening the Occupational and Environmental Health and Safety Pipeline

The United States is facing a critical shortage of occupational and environmental health and safety (OEHS) professionals entering the workforce. This shortage poses a direct risk to the health and safety of workers and communities because fewer qualified experts are available to anticipate, recognize, and control workplace and environmental hazards. Due to rising threats such as extreme heat and infectious diseases, as well as longstanding issues like noise, chemical exposures, and indoor air quality, the need for a robust OEHS workforce has never been greater. Yet most people, including students, educators, employers, and policymakers, are unaware of OEHS and the vital role OEHS specialists play in preventing illness, injury, and death. Without concerted action to expand and strengthen the OEHS workforce pipeline, hazards will go unidentified and unmanaged, which will undermine the health of workers and the public. This position paper outlines AIHA's stance on the need to develop the next generation of OEHS professionals and provides actionable policy recommendations to build awareness, reduce barriers to entry, and bolster OEHS career pathways at the federal, state, and local levels.

Background

Fewer young professionals are pursuing careers in industrial hygiene and related OEHS fields, even as many seasoned practitioners approach retirement. Academic programs in OEHS are limited in number and often lack visibility among students. Small businesses and even some larger employers may underuse OEHS experts, due either to budget constraints or a lack of understanding of the value of these professionals. Meanwhile, hazards continue to proliferate: the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 5,283 workplace fatalities and more than 2.5 million workplace illnesses and injuries occurred in 2023. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the essential role of expertise in infection control while worsening the global shortage of OEHS professionals. Resource constraints at federal agencies such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), as well as state and city health departments, limit oversight of hazards, in part because too few qualified OEHS professionals are available to staff inspection and consulting programs. Together, these factors create a dangerous deficit: hazards are increasing in complexity and scale, but the number of professionals needed to manage them is not keeping pace.

Key Barriers

Several factors contribute to the OEHS workforce shortage.

Lack of Awareness

Young people entering the workforce and adults seeking second careers often do not know that OEHS careers exist. Unlike better-known professions in science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (STEAM), industrial hygiene and occupational health science are rarely mentioned in high school or college career guidance. This invisibility leads to the false impression that additional OEHS professionals are not needed.

Demand-Side Disincentives

Many employers, especially small businesses, hesitate to hire OEHS specialists until regulations or crises force their hands. Because the prevention of occupational diseases and injuries can be difficult to tangibly measure and effective interventions often go unremarked, some decision-makers undervalue proactive OEHS investment. If policymakers and the public are unaware of OEHS benefits, it is harder to prioritize funding for safety programs and personnel, perpetuating a cycle of low demand that discourages entry to the field.

Educational and Financial Barriers

Only a limited number of universities offer industrial hygiene or OEHS degree programs, and these may be geographically distant from many students, creating OEHS education deserts in some regions. The cost of higher education and training is another hurdle. In a recent AIHA survey of technical program students and workers, 33% cited the high cost of obtaining required training or education as one of the top barriers to advancing in safety or health careers.

Lack of Access and Equity

Additionally, underserved communities often lack access to OEHS training or awareness programs, narrowing the diversity and reach of the talent pool. Mentoring and early-career support are not universally available, and without role models and guidance, students who would be interested in OEHS may drift to other fields where their career path is clearer.

Opportunities

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities to reverse the OEHS workforce shortage. OEHS careers are personally rewarding and financially attractive, offering practitioners the chance to protect others while earning competitive salaries. By raising awareness of OEHS career prospects and the meaningful nature of OEHS work, we can attract new talent.

Moreover, populations and communities that historically have not been engaged in OEHS could become sources of future OEHS professionals. For instance, military veterans and technician-level workers in fields such as manufacturing, utilities, and public safety possess applicable skills and could transition into OEHS roles with targeted training. Engaging these non-traditional audiences, along with students in STEAM fields, will strengthen the pipeline.

The moment is ripe for action: federal initiatives around infrastructure and public health, such as school infrastructure rebuilding grants and pandemic recovery programs, provide platforms that OEHS workforce development may be integrated into. To capitalize on these opportunities, AIHA calls for a coordinated effort across industry, education, and government to promote OEHS careers, reduce barriers to entry, and support ongoing professional growth.

Key Policy Recommendations

AIHA urges policymakers, educators, employers, and OEHS professionals to collaborate on the following actions.

Raise Awareness of the OEHS Profession

- Launch outreach and education campaigns to introduce OEHS careers to K-12 schools and colleges, including by integrating occupational health and safety into STEAM curricula.
- Support the development of OEHS modules in science courses and career and technical education programs.
- Recognize Workplace Health and Safety Week, modeled after Engineers Week, to celebrate the contributions of OEHS professionals and inspire students.

Expand Education and Training Pathways

- Invest in OEHS academic programs and scholarships, particularly at the undergraduate and graduate levels, to grow capacity and reduce financial barriers for students.
- Encourage the creation and expansion of apprenticeship and internship programs in OEHS, including those for high school and community college students, to provide hands-on OEHS experience.
- Allow and encourage high school students to complete OSHA 10-hour and 30-hour safety training programs for college credit or graduation requirements, and enable students to contribute those credits to college OEHS programs.
- Support federal funding for National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Education and Research Centers and similar programs that recruit and train OEHS professionals across the country.

Strengthen Demand and Support for OEHS Services

- Encourage businesses and government agencies to proactively employ OEHS expertise. This includes incentivizing small and mid-sized employers to access free or low-cost safety and industrial hygiene consultations through services such as the OSHA On-Site Consultation Program.
- Expand recognition programs, such as OSHA's Voluntary Protection Programs, which showcase exemplary health and safety management systems, conveying to employers that investment in OEHS excellence is valuable.
- Advocate for federal agencies and state governments to hire adequate OEHS staff for enforcement, technical assistance, and protection of public sector workplaces.

Improve School Infrastructure and Safety

- Prioritize healthy and safe school facilities, recognizing that schools are both workplaces and learning environments where students' interest in OEHS may be engaged.
- Support robust investments in school infrastructure at federal, state, and local levels to address hazards in aging school buildings, which are more than 50 years old on average and may contain legacy hazards, such as asbestos, lead, and outdated ventilation. For example, enact and fund measures similar to the proposed Rebuild America's Schools Act of 2023, which would modernize K-12 facilities in underserved school districts.

- Establish OEHS task forces or committees in school districts to routinely assess conditions and recommend improvements.
- Create an Office of School Infrastructure and Sustainability in the Department of Education to provide guidance and resources on environmental health in schools, and reestablish the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities.
- Improve school environmental conditions, such as lighting, air quality, noise, and temperature control, not only to protect students and staff but also to demonstrate the tangible impact of OEHS work, potentially inspiring students to consider OEHS careers.

Bolster Outreach, Mentorship, and Diversity in the Profession

- Empower current OEHS professionals to serve as ambassadors and mentors for the next generation. AIHA's "I Am IH" initiative exemplifies this approach by connecting professionals with schools where they may discuss OEHS careers with students.
- Expand and support mentorship and early exposure programs with partnerships between professional societies, schools, and community organizations, such as Scout troops, 4-H clubs, and Boys and Girls Clubs.
- Emphasize outreach in underserved and underrepresented communities to build a more diverse OEHS workforce that can effectively serve all populations.
- Encourage career mobility and lifelong learning in OEHS by supporting technician-level workers in obtaining further certifications or degrees—for instance, through employer tuition assistance or GI Bill benefits for veterans—and promoting clear career pathways for advancement, such as the AIHA IH/OH Professional Pathway.
- Implement mentorship programs, peer networks, and continuing education to improve the retention and job satisfaction of early-career OEHS professionals.

Together, these measures form a comprehensive workforce development strategy for OEHS. By raising awareness of the profession, removing barriers to entry, and proactively supporting OEHS education and employment, we can cultivate the qualified professionals needed to keep workplaces and communities safe.

Member Communications Toolkit

To support AIHA members in promoting the messages and recommendations in this policy position document, we have prepared the following toolkit. These resources are designed to help you spread awareness about the importance of OEHS workforce development to both general audiences via social media and to policymakers through direct correspondence. Feel free to customize these messages to better fit your voice or context. By speaking up collectively, we can amplify the call to strengthen our profession's pipeline.

Template: LinkedIn Posts

Post 1: Highlighting the OEHS Workforce Shortfall

Did you know there's a critical shortage of new occupational and environmental health and safety (OEHS) professionals? AIHA's latest policy position paper explains that fewer OEHS experts means more unrecognized hazards in workplaces, schools, and communities. The paper also outlines how we can turn things around, from boosting education in health and safety to supporting internships and apprenticeships in our field.

As an OEHS professional, I see how important our role is to protecting workers every day. Investing in the next generation of OEHS professionals will save lives and create healthier workplaces for all. Spread the word about OEHS careers and mentor the young professionals who will carry our mission forward.

#WorkforceDevelopment #IndustrialHygiene #OEHS #SafeWorkplaces

Post 2: The Value of an OEHS Career

What if I told you there's a career that lets you save lives, protect your community, and earn a great salary doing it? It's true, with a career in occupational and environmental health and safety (OEHS). Unfortunately, many students have never heard of it. As a member of AIHA, I'm excited about our new policy agenda focusing on OEHS workforce development. We want to put our profession on the map for young people. Every project we take on makes a real difference to people's health.

If you're a seasoned pro, consider sharing your story with a local school or mentoring a junior colleague. If you're a student or job seeker passionate about science and helping others, consider a career in OEHS. The world needs more occupational hygienists, safety specialists, and environmental health scientists.

#STEAMcareers #PublicHealth #ProfessionalDevelopment #AIHA

Post 3: Calling Stakeholders to Act

Safety is everyone's business, and ensuring we have enough qualified occupational and environmental health and safety (OEHS) professionals is a community effort. AIHA's new position paper, Strengthening the Occupational and Environmental Health and Safety Pipeline, calls for policymakers, educators, employers, and OEHS practitioners to take action. From encouraging high schools to offer OSHA 10-hour training programs to advocating for Congress to fund NIOSH Education and Research Centers, the paper lays out concrete steps toward expanding the pipeline. I'm particularly encouraged to see that the document focuses on improving school facilities. Healthy, safe schools not only protect students and teachers, they also show young people the difference OEHS professionals make.

I'm inviting all my connections to join this effort, whether they work in OEHS, human resources, education, or government. Read the policy paper's executive summary, share it with your networks, and collaborate on solutions. A stronger OEHS profession means safer workplaces and communities for all of us.

#WorkplaceSafety #Education #FutureOfWork #AIHA

(Tip: When posting on LinkedIn or other social media platforms, consider tagging organizations or individuals relevant to your message, such as AIHA, local universities, or government officials, to increase your post's visibility. Including a link to AIHA's position paper or a compelling image, such as a stock photo of a safety training session or a student in a science lab, can also boost engagement.)

Template Letter to Policymakers

Use the template below to urge lawmakers at the federal or state level to support initiatives that strengthen the OEHS workforce. You should personalize the text in brackets and add any relevant anecdotes or data to make your message more impactful.

[Your Name]

[Your Credentials]

[Your Street Address]

[City, State, Zip Code]

[Email Address]

[Date]

The Honorable [Full Name]

[Office Address of Senator/Representative/State Legislator]

[City, State, Zip]

Dear [Senator/Representative] [Last Name],

I am writing as a constituent and a professional in the field of occupational and environmental health and safety (OEHS) to request your support for strengthening the OEHS workforce in **[your state/the nation]**. As a **[job title]** with **[number]** years of experience, I have dedicated my career to protecting workers and communities from hazards. Now, OEHS faces a critical challenge: a growing shortage of professionals entering the field. This shortage could seriously undermine workplace safety and public health if we do not take proactive steps to address it.

Every day, decisions in workplaces ranging from construction sites to hospitals to manufacturing plants hinge on people who have expertise in hazard recognition and control. OEHS professionals like me help ensure that air is free of toxic fumes, noise levels won't cause hearing loss, machinery is guarded to prevent injuries, and infectious disease risks are mitigated—a role that was particularly significant during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our work doesn't often make headlines, but it is vital. The pandemic brought this to the forefront: businesses, schools, and government agencies turned to us for guidance on keeping people safe. At the same time, it highlighted that there are not enough of us. Many of my mentors in this field are retiring, and unfortunately, fewer young people are replacing them. If this trend continues, employers—including those in **[your state]**—will struggle to find the expertise needed to maintain safe workplaces, and regulatory agencies such as OSHA will face staffing shortfalls, putting workers at greater risk.

Through talking to OEHS students and early-career professionals, I've identified a few reasons for the shortage. The first is lack of awareness. Most students in high school or college have never heard of OEHS as a career path. It's a well-kept secret. Second, there are limited educational programs available. **[Mention OEHS degree programs in your state or that your state has few programs or none.]** Third, for those who do know about OEHS, the cost of obtaining the specialized education or training necessary to enter the field can

be prohibitive. And finally, some smaller businesses may not yet understand the value of hiring OEHS professionals, so demand will remain weak unless encouraged by regulations or incentives.

I urge you to champion policies that can overcome these barriers and build a stronger OEHS workforce. In particular, I ask you to support the following actions:

1. Support the inclusion of OEHS topics in K-12 science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (STEAM) curricula and technical education. This could be through federal STEAM education grants or amendments to education bills. By exposing students to these concepts early in their education—for instance, by encouraging high schools to offer the OSHA 10-hour safety training as part of their curricula—we can spark their interest in OEHS careers and impart lifelong safety knowledge. I also encourage you to support efforts to raise awareness of OEHS nationally, such as by proclaiming Workplace Health and Safety Week, which would be similar to Engineers Week or National Nurses Week.
2. Advocate for funding to expand university and community college programs in OEHS. Specifically, continued support for NIOSH Education and Research Centers in the upcoming budget is crucial. These centers train many of the industrial hygienists and occupational health nurses who serve U.S. industries. [Mention any programs in your state or the lack thereof. If none, stress the need to develop them.] Additionally, consider creating incentives, such as scholarships, loan forgiveness programs, or grants, for students who pursue degrees or certifications in industrial hygiene, safety, or related fields and commit to working in OEHS. These could be modeled on programs for teachers or health care workers in areas facing shortages.
3. Lawmakers often focus on labor and industry, but school environments are an important part of addressing this challenge. I respectfully ask you to support funding and legislation for healthier school facilities—for example, the Rebuild America's Schools Act of 2023 (H.R. 5049/S. 2608) or similar infrastructure initiatives. If passed, not only would this bill improve indoor air quality, water quality, and safety for children and teachers, it would also demonstrate the value of OEHS in our communities. These efforts often involve hiring or consulting with environmental health experts, providing practical opportunities for OEHS professionals and reinforcing the field's pipeline. If the Rebuild America's Schools Act moves forward, I urge you to ensure that it includes requirements for consulting with qualified health and safety personnel, for instance, by mandating that certified industrial hygienists oversee school remediation projects.
4. Many employers in our state want to do the right thing by complying with health and safety regulations but lack the resources to do so proactively. OSHA's On-Site Consultation program is a great source of assistance to them, as are state-level safety grants. Please support funding for these programs and any state or federal measures that encourage small businesses to seek professional safety and health advice. This might include expanding tax credits for safety improvements or supporting pilot programs that place junior OEHS professionals in small businesses as shared consultants. These efforts would protect workers in the short term and create entry-level jobs for newcomers to the OEHS field.

5. Ultimately, I wish to see the importance of OEHS reflected in workforce development policies. This could mean directing the Department of Labor to include occupational safety and industrial hygiene as key sectors in workforce innovation and training grants. It may also mean working with the Department of Education to create a clearinghouse for school safety best practices to guide facility improvements using evidence-based methods. **[If writing to a state legislator, adapt accordingly, such as by requesting that the lawmaker support a state program that provides fellowships for safety officers in rural areas or requires each school district to have a safety committee.]**

By taking these steps, you can help cultivate the next generation of professionals who make sure that every worker, whether they are employed in a coal mine, factory, hospital, or classroom, goes home safe and healthy at the end of the day. This is a bipartisan issue that benefits businesses, workers, and communities alike. It aligns with efforts to promote good jobs, as OEHS careers offer well-paying, meaningful work, as well as those to improve public health, since preventing of workplace injuries and illnesses reduces health care costs and suffering.

As your constituent, I appreciate your time and consideration of this request. I am happy to serve as a resource on these issues if you have questions or would like to discuss how they impact **[your state or jurisdiction]**. I have also attached the executive summary of AIHA's public policy document on OEHS workforce development, which provides more context and data.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to the health and safety of American workers and families. Supporting the OEHS profession will pay dividends in safer workplaces, a stronger economy, and a healthier society for years to come.

Sincerely,
[Your Signature]
[Your Name]
[Title/Organization, If Applicable]
[Contact Information]