



A post-conference evaluation of the 2015 National Occupational Injury Research Symposium



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The National Occupational Injury Research Symposium (NOIRS) is the only national forum focused on occupational injury research findings, data and methods, and prevention strategies; it has been convened every 3–5 years since 1997. Held in May 2015, the 6th symposium's theme was "Advancing Occupational Injury Research through Integration and Partnership." Organizers requested that attendees complete a post-meeting evaluation to assess meeting impact, and gather information useful in planning subsequent meetings and activities. **Method:** The questionnaire was publicized via a quick response code and link to the survey on symposium book cover, and mentioned at each scientific session. The online survey was designed to be completed in ≤15 min; no identifying information was collected. Survey link remained open for seven days post-symposium. **Results:** About 50% of registered attendees responded. Almost half were attending their first NOIRS. Most were researchers (69%); 45% were affiliated with government and 38% with university or research institute. Five of six reported that the symposium mostly or completely met expectations. Reasons for attending included gaining exposure to new areas of research (87%), sharing their research (80%), and to develop new ideas for conducting research (79%). The majority (90%) reported that the symposium provided adequate networking opportunities. The conference venue was reported as good or better by 69%, more so among repeat attendees (77%) compared to first-timers (61%). **Discussion:** The evaluation demonstrated that NOIRS was valuable to attendees, and provided a forum for sharing research results, developing new research ideas, and networking. Respondents provided input on different aspects of NOIRS and suggestions useful in planning next NOIRS, tentatively scheduled for 2018. NOIRS 2015 objectives for integration across disciplines and partnership with industry and safety professionals were partially met. In planning NOIRS 2018, more attention should be paid to attracting and engaging a broader spectrum of attendees.

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1. Introduction

The National Occupational Injury Research Symposium (NOIRS) is the only national forum that is focused on occupational injury research findings, data and methods, and prevention strategies, and has been convened every three to five years since 1997. The theme of the sixth symposium, held in May 2015, was "Advancing Occupational Injury Research through Integration and Partnership." NOIRS 2015 was sponsored by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's (NIOSH) Division of Safety Research (DSR), and co-sponsored by the National Safety Council (NSC), the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE), Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety (LMRIS), and the Society for Advancement of Violence and Injury Research (SAVIR).

NOIRS 2015 was held in Kingwood, West Virginia (WV), about an hour's drive from the NIOSH campus in Morgantown, WV. Previous NOIRS had been held in Morgantown, WV and Pittsburgh, PA. The venue was a National Guard training complex and was economical. There were no registration fees. The venue was comfortable and in a beautiful but rural location. The nearest large airport was about a two and a half hour drive away.

The symposium was attended by more than 250 occupational injury researchers, safety professionals, and students from six countries (including the United States), representing government (state and federal) agencies, universities, research institutes, private sector, labor, and non-profit/non-governmental organizations. The event was publicized through email, social media, and the efforts of the co-sponsors. The two and a half day conference agenda included opening and closing plenaries, eight groups of four to five concurrent topic-specific scientific sessions (with a total of 135 platform presentations), a tutorial session, and two evening networking events, one including a poster session with

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more than 30 poster presentations. The day before the conference, NIOSH offered a workshop on Injury Surveillance Tools and Techniques and tours of five engineering research laboratories at the NIOSH campus.

The conference opening plenary focused on the conference theme and included presentations by John Howard, MD, Director of NIOSH; David Michaels, PhD, MPH, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health; Deborah A. P. Hersman, MS, President and Chief Executive Officer of NSC; and Thomas F. Cecich, CSP, CIH, Senior Vice President of ASSE. The closing plenary included presentations on research-to-practice from a panel including Scott Schneider, CIH, Director of Occupational Safety and Health, Laborers' Health and Safety Fund of North America; Cindy DePrater, Vice President of Environmental Health and Safety, Turner Construction Company; Brad Boehler, President, Linamar Skyjack Group; Letitia Davis, ScD, EdM, Director of Occupational Health Surveillance Program, Massachusetts Department of Health; and Joan Mazur, PhD, Professor, College of Education, University of Kentucky and Southeast Center for Agricultural Health and Injury Prevention. The closing plenary concluded with an interactive discussion between audience and panel members on partnering throughout the research process.

Concurrent scientific sessions included topics related to various industry sectors (e.g., construction, agriculture), high-risk and vulnerable worker groups (e.g., fire fighters, young workers), types of research (e.g., surveillance, laboratory, economics), injury causes (e.g., motor vehicle, violence, ergonomics, falls), prevention strategies and evaluation, and safety climate and culture, representing the spectrum of occupational injury topics.

2. Survey instrument and methods

The conference organizers developed a post-conference evaluation questionnaire to assess the value and impact of NOIRS 2015, and to better inform planning for the next symposium, tentatively scheduled for 2018. Areas of particular interest from the survey were conference experience and impact, particularly how well various aspects of the conference met the expectations of attendees, how attendees intended to use the knowledge and contacts obtained at the conference, and what might be improved for the next NOIRS; a comparison of the experiences of first-time attendees and those who had attended one or more prior NOIRS; as well as demographic and professional information.

The online survey was designed to be completed in less than 15 min, and no personally identifying information was collected. The instrument included closed-ended questions with response options, as well as some open-ended questions that required narrative responses. The survey was publicized throughout the meeting via a quick response (QR) code and link to the survey on the cover of the symposium book, and mentioned at the beginning of each scientific session. An email was distributed after the meeting to remind all registered attendees to complete the evaluation within seven days.

3. Survey results

Among the 266 individuals who registered to attend NOIRS 2015, 134 (50%) took part in the conference evaluation; 90% (120/134) completed the full evaluation. Almost half of the respondents were attending their first NOIRS (48%, 64/134) (Table 1). Respondents were equally split between genders, and were mostly U.S. residents. Professions were predominantly research-related (69%); 45% were affiliated with federal or state governments, and more than a third were from academia. When asked about the meeting location, 74% reported that they would attend again if offered at the same location; only 23% reported that the venue was easy to locate.

Five of six respondents (83%) reported that NOIRS 2015 completely or mostly met their expectations (Table 1). Most respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the conference was well-run (i.e., sessions and

presentations kept to schedule, 90%), that the scientific content was organized appropriately into sessions (88%), that there was adequate opportunity for networking with other attendees (90%), and that there was adequate time for audience members to interact with speakers (82%). A slightly smaller majority believed that the topics presented were relevant to them (75%). Responses were not dissimilar between first-time and repeat attendees.

When asked about various aspects of the meeting, most respondents reported that the concurrent scientific sessions (84%) and their conversations and interactions with conference participants (83%) completely or mostly contributed to their learning experience (Table 1). The combined evening networking and poster session was reported to contribute less to the learning experience (47% completely or mostly). Responses were similar between first-time and repeat attendees, although 90% of repeat attendees reported benefitting from their interactions with conference participants compared to 76% of first-time attendees.

When asked why they decided to attend NOIRS 2015, 87% reported that gaining exposure to new areas of research was important or very important, 80% reported to share their research, and 79% reported to develop new ideas for conducting research (Table 1). Having the opportunity to recharge or refocus was reported as important or very important by 47%. Although not reported as important or very important by many, there were differences in relative importance between first-time attendees and repeat attendees for meeting or identifying potential employers (21% and 6%, respectively), developing new practice approaches from what was learned at NOIRS (58% and 48%), deciding where to continue their public health education (11% and 5%), and the opportunity to recharge or refocus (40% and 53%).

When asked for specific information about what they gained at NOIRS that could not be gained elsewhere, respondents remarked on the attendees (responses included interesting multidisciplinary group, opportunity for a safety practitioner to interact with researchers, inspired by the energy and commitment of the presenters and attendees); the size of the conference (size makes it easier to network, small conference environment encourages more interaction between speakers and audiences and also between participants, opportunity for one-on-one conversations with key people); the focused nature of the meeting (concentrated on occupational injury research); and the atmosphere (relaxed, conducive to learning and interacting).

The respondents also provided many suggestions for what they'd like to see offered at future NOIRS, including topic areas (more intervention research, more sleep and fatigue research, psychological/cognitive demands of changing/hazardous work environments, cost effectiveness of research, workplace road safety, other transportation-related aspects, relationship of injury with psychosocial environment, impact of restructuring of work on injury causation, causes of rail disasters, national or state level campaigns for injury prevention, economic costs of injury to families and communities, young workers as a vulnerable population); tutorials (conducting in-house workplace research, statistical software sessions, more contemporary methods, advanced epidemiologic and statistical methods, how to disseminate research, grants and funding opportunities from NIOSH and others, how to measure impact and evaluate success, use of social media and related metrics); pre-conference workshops (systematic reviews, update on research on underreporting of illness/injury and how to mitigate/address it); more efforts to engage industry partners in a meaningful way; and presentations from the political realm (senator, representative, political strategist, updating legislation).

When asked for examples of why they might recommend NOIRS to a colleague, comments included: learn about current occupational injury research from both NIOSH and non-NIOSH researchers; both research and practice, and the integration of the two, are highlighted; strong co-sponsors; great opportunity for networking; scientific quality; accessibility of presenters and established researchers; it's an evidence-based conference; cost was low, making it easy for students to attend;

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