

American Society of Safety Engineers News
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AMERICAN SOCIETY OF SAFETY ENGINEERS' PRESIDENT CONTINUES CALL FOR ACTION, NOT COMPLACENCY, AS SOCIETY MOVES INTO ITS NEXT 100 YEARS

DES PLAINES, IL (January 4, 2012) – As the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE) enters its next 100 years, ASSE President Terrie S. Norris, CSP, ARM, states that even though recent U.S. fatal occupational injuries reports show a slight decline in work fatalities, 4,547 workers died from on-the-job injuries in 2010 compared with 4,551 in 2009, it is still a call for action. As ASSE and the occupational safety, health and environmental profession welcomes the New Year, Norris reviewed the immediate challenges ahead for ASSE and the safety profession along with its continued growth worldwide.

“As we move into the next 100 years of protecting people, property and the environment, we face many challenges. But our history shows we meet those challenges head on by finding solutions.” Norris said today. ASSE turned 100 in 2011. “Despite the dedicated efforts of ASSE’s members, employers, workers, the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the fact that fatalities are not significantly decreasing should be a call for action, not complacency, especially at an economically challenging time when some of the most dangerous industries are not at full employment.

“A statistical plateau of worker fatalities is not an achievement,” she said. “But evidence that this nation’s effort to protect workers is stalled. These statistics call for nothing less than a new paradigm in the way this nation protects workers.”

Norris said all stakeholders in occupational safety and health need to come down off the plateau of acceptance and work together to find conciliatory ways that help make sure the economy, jobs and corporate bottom lines can benefit from a safe and healthy workforce.

“We need to remind businesses that they should not cut back on occupational safety and health systems,” Norris said. “If they do, it will come back to severely haunt them in the future in the guise of increased health care and workers comp costs, production delays, reputation damage and much, much more.”

Norris said ASSE continues to remind businesses that cutting safety programs during a downturn is not advised. When a robust economy returns those companies that have not sustained a safety and health program may be faced with increased work injuries, illnesses, along with increased health and workers compensation costs and the added cost of re-establishing a culture for safety and health. On the other side, during the down economy Norris noted that ASSE continues to provide its members with key assistance including career resources, ongoing educational opportunities, local and international networking opportunities and more.

A challenge ahead for the profession and businesses, Norris said are risks expected from an aging work population. “As the group of workers born between 1946 and 1964 begin to retire, the U.S. Department of Labor notes that there is a shrinking labor pool to fill those positions. The flip side is that many of those aging workers are delaying retirement due to the economy. Hence, in preparation, Norris notes, employers should prepare their work environment to meet the needs of aging workers. That would include simple changes such as improving illumination, eliminating heavy lifting, installing skid resistant materials for flooring and much more. ASSE members have and will continue to provide best practices, presentations and more on this issue to assist businesses, employers and employees with these changing demographics, Norris noted. The issue will also be discussed during the June 3-6 ASSE Professional Development Conference in Denver along with sessions on 225 other key topics.

Norris also noted there is a dearth of SH&E resources for small and mid-size businesses. Currently, those businesses employing 50-249 employees have the highest rate of job-related injuries and illnesses in the U.S. today, and the least

access to safety and health consultation. ASSE will roll out communications for small and mid-size businesses for the May North American Occupational Safety and Health (NAOSH) Week.

According to NIOSH, the demand for SH&E professionals continue to go up with employers expected to hire 25,000 new SH&E professionals in the next five years and estimating that there may only be 13,000 new SH&E professionals to fill those spots. Norris notes that ASSE and the ASSE Foundation continue to promote the profession by working with ASSE members, schools, practice specialty groups, elementary schools, and high schools offering scholarships, research grants and more.

"I am pleased to see our international outreach efforts are not only leading to a discussion about work safety in countries around the world, but to see changes being made," Norris said. "As more and more of our members over the years have implemented their work safety and health programs at international work sites, more workers in those countries and businesses are seeing the major positive benefits of developing and implementing work safety programs that contribute positively to their bottom line and reputation."

ASSE expects to see continued growth in the New Year. Currently, ASSE has 150 chapters, 38 sections and 61 student sections located in 73 countries, including the Middle East, Kuwait, Nigeria, Philippines, Egypt, Ecuador, and Guam. An India chapter with close to 70 members will be chartered soon.

Additional international activities in 2011 included Norris being named a vice-chair of the International Section of the International Social Security Association's (ISSA) 'Prevention Culture Section' at the 19th World Congress on Safety and Health at Work conference held in Turkey; Norris gave a presentation on 'Preparing HSE Professionals for the Challenges of Tomorrow' and held a discussion with the 'Women in Safety Engineering' group at the ASSE Kuwait Chapter's 'International Health, Safety, Security, Environment (HSSE) and Loss Prevention Professional Development Conference (PDC) and Exhibition' last November; Norris served as keynote speaker at the annual 'HSE Forum in Energy' held in Qatar last October; and, an ASSE Brazil program led by ASSE past president Darryl C. Hill, Ph.D., CSP, resulted in learning more about Brazil's business practices that pertain to occupational safety and the environment with visits to several businesses, colleges and country safety organizations.

"We look forward to the future ahead as we build upon the last century of safety," Norris said. "We will continue to work to raise awareness about the importance of being safe at work and the value of the safety profession. As I've told several ASSE members this past year, I see many unsung heroes when I talk to ASSE members and safety professionals around the world. Today millions of workers leave work injury and illness-free to return home to their families and loved ones, owed in part, to safety professionals. I tell our members that you many never know the people whose lives you touch, but many remember you. Much like a stone thrown into a still pond, the knowledge our members share resounds over and over. Their dedication and passion for protecting people, property and the environment reach farther than they can imagine."

Founded in 1911, the Des Plaines, IL-based American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE) is the oldest safety society. Its more than 34,000 occupational safety, health and environmental professional members lead, manage, supervise, research and consult on safety, health, transportation and environmental issues in all industries, government, labor, health care and education. For more information please go to www.asse.org.