

Looking SHARP

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"Improving Safety & Health For SHARP Companies"



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Remembering Frances Perkins

The sound of fire engines disrupted the silence in New York City's Greenwich Village. Nearby, Frances Perkins was enjoying Saturday tea with her neighbor when the noise aroused their curiosity. The women scurried across Washington Square to find the top floors of the Asche Building, which housed the Triangle Shirt Waist Company, in flames.

The building doors, locked to prevent employee theft, blocked the workers' escape from the burning building. Perkins witnessed the young employees on the ledges of the upper-story windows, hands folded in prayer, leaping to their deaths. In less than an hour, 146 of the 600 workers trapped by the March 25, 1911, fire died.

The image of the charred human remains that lined the sidewalk remained fresh in Perkins' mind for many years to come. It intensified her growing conviction to improve workplace safety to protect workers.

By the time of the Triangle fire, Perkins had already become a strong advocate of workers' rights and protections. Her lifelong conviction began taking root when Perkins was a student at Mount Holyoke College. There, she received an assignment to visit local textile and paper mills to survey the working conditions. Perkins was so appalled by the treacherous conditions, she vowed to help change them.

Years later, in her book, "*The Roosevelt I Knew*", she called the existence of industrial hazards in America's factories "one of our oldest disgraces."

Perkins' experience at Mount Holyoke led her to volunteer among the factory women of Worcester, and later, she accepted a job at Chicago Commons, the famous settlement house. There, she learned more about the ongoing struggle between workers trying to increase their wages and shorten their hours and employers attempting to reduce wages and increase working hours or the intensity of labor.

While working at Chicago Commons, Perkins lived at Hull House, another settlement house that gave her a firsthand opportunity to study the problems of the poor and help find ways to improve their living and working conditions.

In 1907, Perkins returned to the East to become the only paid staff member of the Philadelphia Research and Protective Association. The association was formed to help

Historically, workplace health and safety, like the workplace itself, has been dominated by males and male issues. But economic and cultural developments over the last few decades have created more and better opportunities for women to enter the workplace as blue collar workers. Workplace safety systems need to accommodate this influx of women.

In this issue of **Looking SHARP** we will look at unique health and safety challenges affecting female workers. We'll also focus on topics unique to women in the workplace and gender-specific hazards that concern women. We will also celebrate women who have had a lasting impact on workplace safety through their advocacy, initiative and persistence. *Welcome to this special edition of Looking SHARP!*



See Perkins, page 2

The Mother of Safety: Frances Perkins *(continued from page 1)*

young black women from the South and young white immigrant women from Europe who were arriving in droves to find work, but were often preyed upon or robbed in the process.

In this role, Perkins surveyed the city's rooming houses, improved investigation and counseling methods, and pressured city authorities to enforce stricter lodging house licensing. She issued a report on living and working conditions of young women supporting themselves in a major American city and lobbied for stricter ordinances for rooming house licensing.

Perkins studied economics and sociology at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Finance, then relocated to New York where she accepted a fellowship at the New York School of Philanthropy and enrolled in graduate studies at Columbia University. Pauline Goldmark, head of the School of Philanthropy, had assigned Perkins to survey the Hell's Kitchen section of the West Side. In an effort to help a poor family she had visited there, Perkins met with State Sen. Timothy J. MacMannus, who represented the Hell's Kitchen section. MacMannus helped Perkins, and in doing so, showed her the value of using the political system to achieve her social goals.

In 1910 Perkins became the secretary of the New York Consumers League, formed to educate workers about harmful industrial conditions and lobby for protective legislation. The league's national director, Florence Kelly, assigned Perkins to make extensive surveys of unsanitary cellar bakeries and fire safety in industry. Kelly showed Perkins how to search beyond the immediate conditions to find the roots of safety and health problems in industry.

With Kelly's mentoring, Perkins became a well-known expert on industrial conditions, and her surveys provided the statistics and necessary information needed to build an effective argument for protective social labor legislation.

Perkins' efforts in advancing factory safety led to her appointment as executive secretary of the Committee on Safety, formed as a result of the Triangle fire. She later became a member of the Factory Investigating Commission (FIC), created to review job safety and health conditions in New York

In 1933, Roosevelt was elected U.S. President and offered Perkins an appointment as Secretary of Labor. It was an unprecedented move; never before had a woman

served as a Cabinet member. Nonetheless, before accepting Roosevelt's offer, Perkins told him, "I don't want to say 'yes' to you unless you know what I'd like to do and are willing to have me go ahead and try." She explained her goals: to direct federal aid to the states for unemployment relief, public works, work hour limitations, minimum wage laws, child labor laws, unemployment insurance, social security, and revitalized public employment insurance.

Perkins asked him, "Are you sure you want these things done? Because you don't want me for Secretary of Labor if you don't." Without hesitation, Roosevelt agreed to back her, and incorporated most of her goals a part of his New Deal. Perkins accepted the position and served for 12 years, longer than any other Secretary of Labor in U.S. history.

Many transformations took place during Perkins' term as Secretary of Labor. Perhaps her most significant achievements related to workplace safety and health were passage of the Social Security Act of 1935, which allowed the U.S. Public Health Service to fund state industrial health programs; The Walsh-Healy Public Contracts Act of 1936, which banned contract work done under hazardous conditions; and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which prohibited children under 18 from working in hazardous jobs.

Perkins resigned as Secretary of Labor after Roosevelt's death in 1945. This was not, however, to be the end of her career. The following year, President Harry Truman appointed her to the Civil Service Commission, where she spent seven years as a commissioner focused on privacy violations on job applications. Perkins ended her government career in 1953 and spent the rest of her life teaching and lecturing at prestigious universities. She continued to lecture until weeks before her death in 1965.

Fifteen years later, the new Department of Labor headquarters at 200 Constitution Avenue, N.W., in Washington, D.C., was named the Francis Perkins Building in honor of her many contributions to America's workforce.

Former Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz's tribute couldn't better describe those contributions. He said, "Every man and woman who works at a living wage, under safe conditions, for reasonable hours, or who is protected by unemployment insurance or social security, is her debtor."



Take Charge! Save a Life

In October we recognized Breast Cancer Awareness month! Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in American women, behind lung cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, 2,270 Oklahoma women will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year, and 510 women are expected to die from the disease. The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) wants to remind women to be screened for breast cancer so that early detection and treatment can save lives.

“The most effective way to detect breast cancer at an early, treatable stage is to obtain an annual mammogram starting at age 40,” said Secretary of Health and Commissioner of Health Dr. Mike Crutcher. “Having a clinical breast exam at least every three years by a doctor or nurse is another way to detect breast cancer early. While it is not yet known exactly what causes breast cancer, it is known that certain risk factors are linked to the disease. Women under the age of 40 and those at high risk for breast cancer should talk with their health care provider about screening recommendations.”

The OSDH's Take Charge! program offers no cost breast and cervical cancer screening for low income, uninsured and under insured Oklahoma women between the ages of 40 and 64. For more information, please call the Take Charge! program at 1-888-669-5934.



Source: Oklahoma Department of Health

Look Who's Lookin' SHARP!

Seven more companies have met the requirements for SHARP certification or renewal. In this issue of Looking SHARP, we recognize:

Quick Service Steel Co. in OKC

Autoquip Corp in Guthrie

Arrow Wrecker Service Inc. in OKC

Port City Metal Services in Tulsa

ABB Inc in Bartlesville

Cameron Glass Inc. in Broken Arrow

Huber Engineered Woods in Broken Bow



The dedication these companies have made to safety makes them leaders in our community!
Congratulations on your SHARP Certifications!

Taking Your Health To Heart

One in three American women die from heart disease. In 2003, almost twice as many women died of cardiovascular disease (both heart disease and stroke) than from all cancers combined. The older a woman gets, the more likely she is to get heart disease. But women of all ages should be concerned about heart disease. All women should take steps to prevent heart disease.

Both men and women have heart attacks, but more women who have heart attacks die as a result. Treatments can limit heart damage but they must be given as soon as possible after a heart attack starts. Ideally, treatment should start within one hour of the first symptoms.

African American and Hispanic American/Latina women are more likely to get heart disease because they tend to have more risk factors such as obesity, lack of exercise, high blood pressure, and diabetes than white women. Women of color also are more likely than white women to die of heart disease. If you're a woman of color, take steps to reduce your risk factors.

Heart disease often has no symptoms. But, there are some signs to watch for. Chest or arm pain or discomfort can be a symptom of heart disease and a warning sign of a heart attack. Shortness of breath (feeling like you can't get enough air), dizziness, nausea (feeling sick to your stomach), abnormal heartbeats, or feeling very tired also are signs. Talk with your doctor if you're having any of these symptoms. Your doctor will take a medical history, do a physical exam, and may order tests.

Not everyone has all of these warning signs of heart attack. Other symptoms, such as shortness of breath (feeling like you can't get enough air), breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea (feeling sick to your stomach), or feeling faint or woozy. And, sometimes these signs can go away and come back.

Some women have more vague symptoms including: unusual tiredness, trouble sleeping, problems breathing, indigestion (upset stomach), and anxiety (feeling uneasy or worried)

If you think you, or someone else, may be having a heart attack, wait no more than a few minutes—five at most—before calling 911. Having an AED can also improve the chances of surviving a heart attack.

You can find out more about heart disease by contacting the National Women's Health Information Center at 1-800-994-9662 or the American Heart Association at www.americanheart.org



Sources: womenshealth.gov

Reproductive Hazards In The Workplace

Workers face many workplace health and safety hazards. There are hazardous chemicals as well as a variety of physical and biological agents (such as radiation and bacteria) used in many workplaces which expose workers to health and safety hazards. Additionally, there are many work situations (such as work which is highly stressful, workplace violence, or shift work) which may have negative effects on the health of workers, including their reproductive health.

To date, most chemical substances and work situa-

♀♂ Use your MSDS sheets to identify mutagenic and/or teratogenic chemicals found in your workplace. Make a list of these chemicals used in your workplace.

♀♂ Ensure your personal protective equipment assessment addresses the type of PPE needed for workers handling these chemicals and ensure workers are trained on the hazards associated with these chemicals.

♀♂ In some cases, work assignments may need to be altered for workers at greatest risk.

♀♂ Male and female reproductive hazards need to be identified and properly addressed.

tions have not been studied for their potential to have damaging effects on a worker's health. It is known, however, that many substances may have negative effects on the reproductive health of women workers who are exposed to them. Unfortunately, many substances are used at work anyway, despite the lack of information about possible reproductive health effects.

It is important that workers and employers learn as much as possible about the substances and situations in their workplaces. Protective measures should be implemented to ensure that pregnant workers and workers who may be planning to have a child are not exposed to known or suspected reproductive health hazards.

Some workplace exposures can prevent conception. Exposure to certain substances or combinations of substances can cause changes in a reproductive system, damage to the eggs, changes in the genetic material carried by the eggs, or cancer or other diseases in a woman's and men's reproductive organs.

A substance that causes changes in genetic material is called a mutagen. There are special laboratory tests, often performed on animals, which can identify substances as mutagens.

See Reproductive Hazards on page 5

The Writer's Block: Hang Up and Drive!

by Betsey Kulakowski



Kulakowski

My name is Betsey Kulakowski, and I think I'm addicted to *crack*. No, not drugs...technology! In a recent issue of Looking SHARP we published a story about addiction to electronics referring to the popular Blackberry device by its more common name, "Crack-berry".

Now, I don't have a "Crack-berry", but like most people these days, I have a cell phone, and an iPod. I have a computer on my desk at work and a laptop that I use at home. I don't talk on the phone much, but I've learned how to make the text-message thing work (I admit it, I'm old enough its not automatic for me). Given my druthers, I'd rather spend my free time at home on the computer playing games or writing. I don't even watch TV much. Yet, when it comes to work, the time for fun and games is over.

It's true, medical science has not officially recognized tech-addiction as a bona fide medical condition. Yet a 2006 article in the journal Perspectives in Psychiatric Care said technology can "promote addictive behaviors" and advocated formally recognizing its use as a possible addiction to improve treatment.

"People use the term 'addiction' pretty indiscriminately, without considering the formal criteria that needs to be met," said Robert A. Zucker, director of the Addiction Research Center at the University of Michigan. He said patients must display certain behaviors including craving, compulsive use, neglecting other responsibilities, withdrawal when the addictive object is not available, and other habits to be considered addicts.

From a safety standpoint, arguing over addiction is of little value, however, when mobile devices and other electronic distractions adversely impact safety on the job, then it gets to be a management issue.

Employees need all their focus and attention to do their jobs safely, after all, they're probably already multitasking while running a piece of heavy machinery (car, truck, press brake, skid-steer, etc). These are issues employers need to be addressing through policy and training so workers can dedicate their full attention to working safely. If you don't have a policy that states they can't text, talk on the phone while driving or operating heavy machinery, it's as good as saying, "It's okay. Go ahead and do it." Making it part of your safety rules is vital.

Dr. Zucker goes on to say, "I remain skeptical of the characterization (regarding tech-addiction). It is trendy but not scientific." And we all know, trends are a strong indicator of the need for action.

So, I guess I'm not addicted after all. I value my safety enough to "hang up, unplug, and drive."

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Reproductive Hazards *(Continued...)*

Some mutagenic substances are also known to cause cancer in humans. Substances that cause cancer are called carcinogens. Reproductive organs can become diseased or function abnormally as a result of exposure to certain hazardous substances.

Some chemicals may cause cancer in one or more of these organs.

Once fertilization occurs, some harmful substances can pass through the mother to the developing embryo or fetus. The fetus is generally thought to be at greatest risk during the first 14 to 60 days of the pregnancy, when the major organs are being formed. However, depending on the type and amount of exposure, a fetus can be harmed at any time during the pregnancy. A substance that prevents the normal development of a fetus is called a teratogen. Teratogens can pass from the blood of the mother to the blood of the fetus across the placenta.

There are a number of chemical, biological and physical agents used in a variety of workplaces that are known to cause birth defects. Birth defects can include a wide range of physical abnormalities and behavioral or learning problems.

Other factors can also affect the health of a developing fetus, such as stress, smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol or taking certain drugs and medications. These factors can combine with hazardous work situations and increase the dangers to a fetus even more.

Occupational exposures can also harm a developing child even after it is born. It is important to know that newborns and children are particularly sensitive to chemicals or other harmful substances, such as dusts or fibers, that may be brought into the home on clothing, shoes or even skin and hair. If harmful substances are present in breast milk, then infants can also take in those substances while breast-feeding.

By identifying and addressing these issues, employers can ensure they are providing a safe and healthful workplace for their employees, as well as their growing families.



Stressing Out: It's Worse Than You Think

Psychological stress doesn't just put your head in a vise. New studies document exactly how it tears away at every body system-- including your brain. But get this: The experience of stress in the past magnifies your reactivity to stress in the future. So take a nice deep breath and find a stress-stopping routine this instant.

"If you wait until you're feeling stressed before you employ some technique for managing stress," contends psychologist Robert Epstein, Ph.D., "it's already too late. You need to have a bag of tricks that you can deploy proactively. If you turn to them throughout the day, that changes your threshold of stress tolerance.

While there is no quick fix for stress, and not every technique will work for everyone. Most experts agree, meditation or some form of guided imagery are among the easiest ways to minimize the body's reaction to stress.

Most forms of meditation use other devices to bring on moments of quiet contemplation, but all are designed to get you to focus on your body. "The most important thing is becoming aware of your body so you can sense when you are getting stressed. Meditation is an excellent way to do that" says Santorelli. "But it's not for everyone."

Since you can never have too many tricks in your little bag. Here are some "proven stress-busters" from Paul Rosch, M.D., president of the American Institute of Stress: Find a comfortable posture and close your eyes. Imagine the most relaxed place you've ever been. We all have a place like this and can call it to mind anywhere, any time. For everyone it is different. It may be a lake. It may be a mountain. It may be a cottage at the beach. Are you there?

☉ Curl your toes against the soles of your feet as hard as you can for 15 seconds, then relax them.

☉ Progressively tense and relax the muscles in your legs, stomach, back, shoulders, neck.

☉ Visualize lying on a beach, listening to waves coming in and feeling the warm sun and gentle breezes on your back. Or, if you prefer, picture yourself in whatever situation makes you happiest.

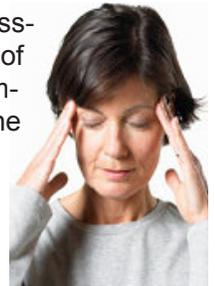
Other options to reduce stress include:

☉ Set aside 20 to 30 minutes a day to do anything you want-- even nothing.

☉ Take a brisk walk.

☉ Keep a Walkman handy and loaded with relaxing, enjoyable music.

"Beating stress is a matter of removing yourself from the situation and taking a few breaths," says Rosch. "If I find myself getting stressed I ask myself 'is this going to matter to me in five years?' Usually the answer is no. If so, why get worked up over it?"



Women Have A Valuable Ally In The Workplace

Ask a working woman what obstacles and challenges she faces at the workplace, and she'll likely say that balancing the demands of work and family are getting increasingly more difficult. Overall, women are working longer hours and are increasingly finding themselves working irregular schedules that do not match those of their spouses or partners. According to the study, 63 percent of women are working 40 hours a week or more, up 3 percent since 2000.

What is even more striking is the amount and type of hours married working mothers put in. Sixty-eight percent of them are working more than 40 hours, and 38 percent work hours that their spouses don't.

Perhaps a fringe benefit of the changing workplace is the support from an unlikely ally: Men.

For example, in the past year, 48 percent of women saw their responsibilities increase, but only half of them received more pay along with the added duties.

It probably comes as no surprise then that the wage gap concerns 92 percent of women. It also concerns men — 86 percent of them — who say combating unequal pay is very important.

"Men now fully accept women as essential wage earners in the family," says Nussbaum. "They see themselves less as

competitors in the workplace and more as supporters of their wives' career moves, especially as it helps earning potential."

Women have definitely come a long way since the first wage gap studies have been done in the 1920s, but the battle is far from over. Especially considering that while women started closing the gap in the 1980s, it stagnated in the 1990s and has actually increased recently, Boushay says.

"We started to fix this problem, but then people got lazy to a degree and the attitude shifted to, 'This is a problem that will fix itself,'" she adds.

Still, men have really come to recognize the financial contribution women are making, says Boushay. And they are just as concerned for their children's welfare.

Hopefully having men on board will bring national attention to what were traditionally considered "women's issues" — care giving needs, family leave limitations and the ever-present wage gap, Nussbaum says.

Sources: ABC News

Looking SHARP is a quarterly publication by the Oklahoma Department of Labor, OSHA Consultation Division. This publication is intended to assist employers pursuing SHARP Certification, as well as other employers, with improving safety and health conditions in their workplaces. If you have questions and/or suggestions for future issues, or if you would like to subscribe to our email version of Looking SHARP, contact the editor, Betsy Kulakowski, via email at bkulakowski@oklaosf.state.ok.us or call 405-528-1500, Ext. 282.

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