

Rebuttal of the Proposed Elimination of the NIOSH Education and Research Centers

The following is a point by point rebuttal of the White House Justification for eliminating funding for the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Education and Research Centers (ERCs) in the President's proposed Fiscal 2012 Budget.

The original programmatic plan was to provide money for five years for institutions to develop and/or expand existing occupational health and safety training programs and for the grantees to become self-sustaining over time. This original goal has been met.

Rebuttal:

- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of occupational health and safety specialists and technicians is expected to increase 11% during the 2008-18 decade.
- Emergency preparedness will continue to increase in importance, creating demand for qualified occupational safety and health (OSH) professionals and more specialists will be needed to cope with technological advances in safety equipment and threats, changing regulations, and increasing public expectations.
- The statutory goal of the ERCs is “to provide an adequate supply” of qualified occupational safety and health (OSH) professionals without a time limit. Currently the 17 ERCs produce approximately 40 % of the government-projected need, showing the ongoing unmet need for these Centers.

In addition, CDC does not have a means for tracking the location and employment of ERC graduates or the percentage of graduates who work at health departments and there is no data on the number of graduates that have entered the field.

Rebuttal:

- NIOSH tracks the location and employment of ERC graduates annually through the requirement that every ERC provide lists of its graduates from the previous year, how many were supported by NIOSH funds, and where they are currently working.
- There *is* annual data on the numbers of ERC graduates who have entered the field. In the 2009-2010 academic year, 82 percent of ERC graduates entered careers in occupational safety and health or entered more advanced degree programs in OSH.
- NIOSH has an annual record of how many graduates work for health departments as well as for private industries and government agencies.

The ERCs overlap activities offered by the Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Bureau through their Outreach Training Program, Resource Center Loan Program, and Training Institute Education Centers.

Rebuttal:

- NIOSH and OSHA are two distinct agencies in two different Federal departments.
- The NIOSH mandate is to conduct research and provide professional training in occupational safety and health, while the OSHA mandate is to regulate OSH conditions in the workplace and provide worker training. There is no overlap.

- ERCs fulfill the NIOSH mandate by conducting research, and training masters and doctoral students and medical residents in the science and art of occupational safety and health.

All of the ERC grants are jointly funded by CDC and the Academic Center grantee. CDC contributions cannot exceed 50 percent of individual faculty and professional staff total salaries and fringe benefits. The budget request only eliminates the CDC portion.

Rebuttal:

- This statement ignores the fact that at least 60% of ERC funds must go directly toward tuition and stipend support for students. Thus harm from the elimination of the ERCs would fall primarily on the backs of students.
- While NIOSH grants allow for up to 50% of faculty and staff salary to be paid by the ERC, the actual percentage paid is on the order of 5-15% since most funds must go to students.
- NIOSH funds are the foundation by which ERCs leverage state, university, and local funds, without which they would not exist.
- State and private support for any academic program nationally is slim, particularly with current conditions of severe financial constraints.

The non-federal portion of the ERCs could still be continued and the private sector could also increase funds for these activities.

Rebuttal:

- With states increasingly hard-strapped for funds during this severe economic downturn, including continually diminishing funds for their public universities, they are not in a position to increase funding for OSH programs.
- With diminished ERC funding, many institutions will have no recourse but to close many OSH programs which are important components of existing ERCs.

In FY 2012, Other Occupational Safety and Health is funded entirely through the PHS Evaluation Transfer. CDC's other occupational safety and health activities include mine research, surveillance, exposure assessment and outreach, as well as other critical areas such as personal protective technology. CDC's personal protective technology program focuses on research, standards, development, respirator certification, surveillance and outreach.

Rebuttal:

- The scope of these activities, while important, are very narrow and do not address all of the research needs, nor any of the training needs of the occupational safety and health profession.
- The interdisciplinary training provided by the ERCs produce graduates with a well-rounded breadth of knowledge in more than one health and safety specialty making them a greater asset to their employers by being qualified to fill multiple job responsibilities.