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SPALW- SAFETY PROFESSIONALS TAKE STEPS TO ADDRESS INCREASE IN LATINO WORKFORCE INJURIES, FATALITIES

LAS VEGAS, NV (June 10, 2004) - The American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE) has taken several steps this week to address the growing problem of increased workplace injuries and fatalities in the Latino workforce.

Even though private injury and illness rates dropped 35 percent between 1992 and 2001, fatalities among Latino workers in the U.S. increased by 67 percent during the same period. And even though Latino fatalities decreased by six percent in 2002, the 840 deaths in 2002 represent the second highest annual total of Latino worker fatalities recorded by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to date.

At ASSE's annual Professional Development Conference (PDC) for occupational safety, health and environmental professionals being held this week in Las Vegas, the ASSE board approved the formation of a new "Safety Professionals and the Latino Workforce" (SPALW) common interest group. On Tuesday afternoon close to 60 ASSE members from all industries and regions of the U.S. attended SPALW's first meeting and discussed such issues as lagging translations, hands-on training versus textbook, and overcoming the cultural and language barriers. They also discussed how to work together to identify and develop resources to increase safety for the Latino workforce.

SPALW is open to all ASSE members and non-members. It was formed by ASSE to assist Latino individuals and those who work with Latinos in all industries to improve safety among this workforce, a group that has witnessed a major increase in serious workplace accidents nationwide, according to ASSE Regional Vice President and Council on Member and Region Affairs' Diversity Committee Chair Fred Miller. ASSE recognized and promoted the need for involvement by the members to successfully reach the goals of the new group. Miller noted that the cultural gap, communication barriers and training deficiencies have been identified as major influences on the increasing accident rates. The new interest group is chaired by ASSE member Hector Escarcega.



ASSE member and 'Safety Professionals & the Workforce' Common Interest Group Chair Hector Escarcega addresses the audience during an ASSE Professional Development Conference (PDC) session June 8 in Las Vegas.

In his keynote address to ASSE members at the PDC June 9, National Institute for

Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Director Dr. John Howard said, “The flow of immigrants in the U.S. is both responsible for increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of the American workforce, but more than that it is responsible for challenging our ability to create a transcultural workplace safety paradigm in the U.S. – emphasizing risk communication strategies that are responsive to the multi-cultural composition of the American workforce. “Latino workforce safety is a national, regional, state and local safety issue,” Dr. Howard continued. “Data from the 2000 Census tells us that the transcultural challenges in occupational safety are not limited to those states traditionally associated with large Latino populations – such as California, Texas, New York and Florida. Rather, the challenge of developing culturally integrated approaches to workplace safety will impact numerous other states not known for large Latino populations such as North Carolina, Minnesota, Nebraska, Arkansas, Georgia, Nevada, Tennessee, Alabama and South Carolina.”

ASSE is working with such groups as NIOSH and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to develop risk communications that build on workers' cultural values; that are effective without assuming a ‘standard’ educational attainment on the part of the worker; and a risk communication paradigm that incorporates hands-on demonstrations of safety principles instead of relying on a worker's oral or written language literacy.

During the ASSE PDC some sessions were presented in Spanish and some were directed at those with a Latino workforce such as the sessions titled **“Training and Communication Skills for Developing a Safety Culture,” “You Don't Have to Speak Spanish to Communicate with Your Spanish Speaking Workforce,”** and **“How to Understand and Apply OSHA's Fall Protection Standard.”** One day training classes were held for Latino workers in conjunction with the PDC as well.

Several resources now available that address increasing workplace safety for Latino workers include OSHA's Spanish-language web site www.osha.gov/as/opa/spanish/index.html , and NIOSH's Spanish web site at www.cdc.gov/spanish/niosh. ASSE Professional Safety Journal's June 2004 feature article titled “Latino Workers in the Construction Industry – Overcoming the language barrier improves safety” by R. Fernando Vazques and C. Keith Stalnaker also provides information on resources and techniques for reducing injuries among Latino workers.

Founded in 1911, ASSE is committed to protecting people, property and the environment. Its more than 30,000 members manage, supervise, research and consult on safety, health, transportation and environmental issues in all industries, government, labor and education. Check www.asse.org or contact customerservice@asse.org for more information on how to participate in the new ASSE ‘Safety Professionals and Latino Workforce’ common interest group. [Click here to go back to ASSE NEWS](#)