

## Reflections on past accomplishments and future plans: ABIH, certification and Certificant holders

*Scott Merkle, ABIH Board Chair, 2008-2009, and Torey Nalbone, ABIH Board Chair, 2010*

From: Scott Merkle  
February 15, 2010

As I complete my service on the ABIH Board, including the past two years as Chair, it is a good time to reflect on our accomplishments and how they may lead to future opportunities. Each successive Board is not defined by a singular body of work; rather each Board is a temporary custodian of a continuous process to advance the quality and value of the CIH credential. I have had the great privilege to work with a group of ABIH Directors whose talent and dedication to the industrial hygiene profession has been outstanding.

A few of the highlights for 2009 include:

- **ANSI accreditation**  
In March, the ABIH achieved accreditation by the American National Standards Institute for its CIH program. The accreditation was awarded under the ANSI standard ISO/IEC 17024 - *Conformity assessment - General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons*. This new accreditation is significant because it clearly demonstrates that ABIH is providing a high-quality certification system that meets nationally and internationally recognized professional standards. ABIH is also accredited under the Council of Engineering and Scientific Specialty Boards standards for certifications and is an officially recognized certification board by the International Occupational Hygiene Association.
- **The CIH examination**  
A new Job Analysis was implemented to ensure the examination is content valid and appropriately evaluates the knowledge and skills required in the practice of industrial hygiene. The Job Analysis process involved expert panels and a random survey of 1,000 CIHs who were certified within the last 10 years.
- **The global practice of industrial hygiene**  
In October, the Board drafted a memorandum of agreement (MOA) that will begin a collaborative effort to develop an internationally recognized scheme of credentialing for intermediate IH practice. The goals of the working group will be to foster a global community of occupational hygiene practitioners at all levels and to develop a common platform for the credentialing of occupational hygiene technicians / technologists that achieves international acceptance and recognition. The initial signers of the MOA include the ABIH, the BOHS Faculty of Occupational Hygiene, and the Canadian Board of Registered Occupational Hygienists and others are joining the effort as well.

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- Program to recognize quality industrial hygiene training  
The Board has been evaluating the benefits of establishing a program to recognize training programs that meet defined standards of excellence. A goal of the program would be to encourage the building of industrial hygiene capacity throughout the world by promoting quality learning and skill development. To achieve a level of ABIH recognition beyond the awarding of CM points, training providers would supply information to ABIH that addresses areas such as trainer qualifications, learning objectives, course content and design, and methods of assessment.

Respectfully,

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From: Torey Nalbone, ABIH Board Chair, 2010  
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There should be (and is) great anticipation and excitement for the future of the ABIH and the certification of the professional practice of industrial hygiene. As we, the ABIH, celebrate our Fiftieth Anniversary it is obvious that much is owed to the history both recent and past to the endeavors of our organization. Fortunately in moving forward we have some excellent guidance from the past and as a long time a student of history I fully embrace George Santayana's words, "*Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.*"

In the next year the ABIH will continue in the effort toward an international scheme of intermediate IH practice; however, we need only to look to an address by Dr. Henry F. Smyth in 1965 to see that the educational standards to define industrial hygiene practice were of concern even fifty years ago, "The board recognizes that the certification program must be only the first of its activities, and perhaps in retrospect it will be found to have been the least important. Of much greater value to the professional will be general agreement upon adequate educational standards for the practice of industrial hygiene."<sup>1</sup> Over the next year this effort to establish a group of core competencies for the intermediate level will involve the direction and effort of numerous international partners. This process was begun by the Council of the Academy of Industrial Hygiene and the goal is to identify the essential content (education) and components (skills) in order to provide a consistent level of expectations for this level of practice. It is obvious that the ABIH is not alone in this concern and the international effort that was begun in earnest in 2009 will continue, "It is logical the group which evaluates competence should be an important factor in setting educational standards..."<sup>1</sup>

It is also anticipated that as the competencies are defined the desire for certification will increase and the ABIH will as it has over the last few years continue to offer the certification examination outside of the

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United States. Obviously this means moving away from country specific regulatory issues and a greater focus on standards of best practice. This means that the ABIH must continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the CIH exam and include in the exam appropriate questions to evaluate the current practice of industrial hygiene.

The Board recognizes that being able to certify competent practice also means being a competent and credible certifying entity. That is why the continued emphasis and maintenance of the ANSI/ISO accreditation plays an important part of the ABIH planning for the future. As we all know professional certification does not come without costs, both time and money. The commitment to maintain an international recognition for our certification process will require a reevaluation of how the ABIH Board prioritizes the financial and personnel resources available. Therefore one of the Board responsibilities moving forward is to recognize the limitations of our hard working staff and when necessary make adjustments so that our stakeholders (those certified and desiring certification) are provided the service they have come to appreciate after 50 years.

Additionally, for the last several years the community of practicing industrial hygienists has struggled with our “value” in general. In these times of “down-sizing”, right-sizing” or just plain rationalizing, the belief is that employers have lost sight of the benefit of having certified industrial hygienists on staff. Because although some want to measure the success of certification in financial terms the truth is that the benefits of certification are better measured in the conservation of the human resources. As part of an intersociety effort the ABIH must increase the effort to “sell” to all employers the investment they make in hiring a certified industrial hygienist. In 1966 the beginnings of recognition were in their infancy and unfortunately in the last fifty years most will say we have done well to maintain our ground but not significantly moved forward to a larger recognition of certification, at least outside of the profession itself. We must endeavor to maintain the number so of CIH’s and work tirelessly to replace those professionals that we will inevitably lose for a variety of reasons. If current trends in applications and exam completion are not addressed the replacement rate of CIH will barely hold on to our current numbers.

Finally, the Board has to take a hard look to the future beyond this year or even the next. We have to engage the diplomates in a frank discussion about what is needed to be a successful profession on into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Taking stock in our history but moving forward for future success and growth have to be an integral part of this year’s agenda for the ABIH.

Sincerely,

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1. Smyth, H. F., (1966). American Board of Industrial Hygiene, American Journal of Public Health, **56** (7), 1120-1127.