

Occupational Hygiene: where from and to?

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SUMMARY

Occupational Hygiene was born in the forties in the USA, from the need to focus on the causes of the occupational diseases from a scientific and technical point of view. In other words this is to understand how to detect, how to evaluate and how to control the chronic risks at the workplace. The discipline developed very well from that time up to the nineties thank to a strong commitment of dedicated people and professional societies supported by international organizations such as the ILO and the WHO. Nowadays the situation of Occupational Hygiene differs considerably between countries which can arbitrarily be categorized according to the "culture and tradition" they have in this field. The development of this science has decreased in the countries where it has been very well established. This is probably due to the fact that the field of Occupational Health has been enlarged very much in the last decade so that Occupational Hygiene has to struggle more than before to defend its ecological niche (specificity) in this vast domain. In some countries the discipline is mixed with safety or environmental protection or even with the quality management and there is no curricula for Occupational Hygiene only. In many countries it simply does not exist. What will be the future of Occupational Hygiene? It is not possible to answer this question but there are clear opportunities to show the importance of Occupational Hygiene such as the REACH regulation in Europe which full comply with the core competencies of this profession. Other opportunities such as the elaboration of simple tools to assess and control the occupational hazards (toolkits) may also lead to a decrease in the need of well educated professionals since these tools will not require a long training to be used. In conclusion, the future will depend on the way the actual occupational hygienists will work to become more visible and to be considered as essential partners to reach the main goal of Occupational Health which is to build up healthy workplaces, for healthy companies in a healthy economy. The Occupational Hygiene Societies at the national level and the IOHA (International Occupational Hygiene Association) at the international level, will have a key role to play in this future evolution.