

# Global occupational health news

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This report includes news from some of the international and regional occupational health organisations with whom the South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM) interacts. The 'new normal' ways of living and working that are direct results of the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic have shown us, throughout most of the current year, that never has it been more important to collaborate and share learnings.

## THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

In terms of the current global health emergency, the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) is well-placed to play a key role in contributing to the body of knowledge on COVID-19, through its membership of occupational safety and health (OSH) professionals from 114 countries. To this end, ICOH launched a survey on COVID-19, which was administered to ICOH national secretaries and other senior OSH experts throughout the world. The survey collected information on public health policies, prevention measures, and other policies put in place by the national governments of various countries to contain the global pandemic. The results will be published through ICOH channels and may be used for analysis and benchmarking at both national and international levels.

An official ICOH statement to highlight the importance of successful prevention and management of the COVID-19 pandemic at work was submitted at the Special Session of the World Health Organization (WHO) Executive Board on the implementation of the World Health Assembly Resolution WHA73.1 COVID-19 response (5–6 October 2020). The proposals made in this Statement include working towards the wide recognition of work-related COVID-19 cases as occupational disease cases; ensuring access to competent occupational health services for all working people; and paying special attention to the protection of COVID-19 high-risk workers across various sectors. The Statement can be accessed at: <https://extranet.who.int/nonstateactorsstatements/meetingoutline/196>

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought OSH and social security systems to the top of the agenda for policymakers around the world. This was a key theme of the two-day special session on COVID-19 and OSH, organised by the XXII World Congress on Safety and Health at Work 2021, and held virtually on 5 and 6 October 2020. The online event, drawing thousands of participants from over 150 countries, was hosted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Social Security Association (ISSA), and the national co-hosts of next September's XXII World Congress on Safety and Health at Work in Toronto, Canada: the Institute for Work and Health (IWH) and the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS). The ICOH leadership was invited to present at these virtual special sessions where COVID-19 and precarious workforces were hot topics. Dr Jukka Takala, ICOH president (Finland), presented in

the session 'Round Table 2: Multidisciplinary and multilateral action for common problems: The case of the Global Coalition for Safety and Health at Work'. Prof. Seong-Kyu Kang, ICOH vice president for National Secretaries (Republic of Korea), presented in the session 'Panel 1: Innovations in addressing COVID-19'. Recordings of the sessions are available online for a limited time at: <https://www.safety2021canada.com/session-recordings/>

'Making the difference in occupational health: Three original and significant cases presented at ICOH congresses in the 20th century' is the title of an ICOH study by Prof. Sergio Iavicoli, ICOH secretary general (Italy), and co-authors, illustrating the historical and pioneering roles that the ICOH congresses have played in terms of knowledge transfer of research findings and prevention study results impacting on global public health. The paper was published in *Safety and Health at Work (SH@W)* (Vol. 11, No. 2, 2020) and can be accessed at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2093791119307620?via%3Dihub>

The ICOH Scientific Committee on Occupational Health for Health Workers (SC OHHW), chaired by Dr Gwen Brachman (USA), prepared a statement in support of occupational health for health workers. The Statement was informed by the events in honour of this year's World Patient Safety Day (WPSD 2020) on 17 September, organised by the WHO. The objective of WPSD 2020 was to raise global awareness about the importance of health workers' safety in sustaining a healthcare system and increasing patient safety. The theme was *Health worker safety: A priority for patient safety*, which focused on the interrelationship between patient safety and health worker safety.

The SC OHHW Statement listed key elements that should be included in national programmes on occupational health for health workers to prevent occupational diseases and injuries, improve their physical and mental wellbeing, and ensure sustainable compensation and legal protections. It states that 'protecting the health and safety of all health workers is essential in order to have an adequate workforce of trained and healthy personnel in the healthcare sector;



**Throwback to November 2018 – the SASOM AGM and Conference, hosted by the SASOM Western Cape Chapter in Stellenbosch, brought together close to 80 delegates, exhibitors, organisers and invited presenters in an idyllic winelands setting**

Photograph: Claudina Nogueira

we should all be actively prioritising the occupational health and safety of health workers, both as a labour right and to ensure patient safety'.

The ICOH Scientific Committee on Shiftwork and Working Time (SC SWT), in collaboration with the Working Time Society (WTS), contributed to a special issue of *Industrial Health* (Vol. 57, No. 2, 2019) that published a series of consensus papers and good practices on various aspects of shiftwork. As stated by the authors of the Foreword (Dr Stephen Popkin (USA) – chair: SC SWT; and Prof. Frida Marina Fischer (Brazil) – ICOH Board member and past chair: SC SWT), the intent of the special issue of the journal is to 'inform professional communities on the current state of science regarding working time and provide useful information to stakeholders (practitioners, policy makers, and workers) on topics that affect the worker community'. The journal issue can be accessed at: [https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/browse/indhealth/57/2/\\_contents/-char/en](https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/browse/indhealth/57/2/_contents/-char/en)

The ICOH Scientific Committee on Unemployment, Job Insecurity and Health (SC UJIH), chaired by Dr Minha Rajput-Ray (UK), undertook the arduous task of translating the ICOH occupational health guidebook *Creating a Safe and Healthy Workplace: A Guide to Occupational Health and Safety for Entrepreneurs, Owners and Managers* into Bahasa Indonesian. In 2014, the original English version of this guidebook was edited and co-ordinated by Dr Tee Guidotti (USA), using contributions by students and professionals in various OSH disciplines. The original version was sponsored by ICOH and the ICOH Scientific Committee on Occupational Health and Development, and was launched at the ICOH2015 Congress in Seoul in the Republic of Korea. Subsequently, the guidebook has been translated into Arabic, Chinese, French, Portuguese, Russian, Turkish and, now, Bahasa Indonesian. All versions are available free of charge on the ICOH website: <http://www.icohweb.org/site/oh-guide.asp#oh-guide>

The translation of the guidebook into Bahasa Indonesian, titled *Menciptakan Tempat Kerja yang Aman dan Sehat*, was spearheaded by Dr Anna Suraya from Binawan University in Jakarta (Indonesia) and secretary of the SC UJIH. ICOH sponsored the printing of 500 copies and a virtual launch was held on 15 September 2020. The guidebook will be distributed to several universities that collaborate with small-scale industries, workers' unions, the Indonesian entrepreneur association, and other entities, with the aim of disseminating it as widely as possible for maximum benefit to workforces. Ms Claudina Nogueira, ICOH vice president for Scientific Committees, was invited to deliver the opening message at the virtual launch of the Indonesian guidebook.

The ICOH Scientific Committees on Radiation and Work (SC R&W) and Occupational and Environmental Dermatoses (SC OED), chaired by Dr Marc Wittlich (Germany) and Dr Sanja Kezic (the Netherlands), respectively, organised and co-hosted a webinar titled 'Solar Radiation Issues' on 19 October 2020. Dr Caradee Wright from the South African Medical Research Council gave a presentation titled 'Ultraviolet exposure and prevention from a South African perspective'.

The 2nd International Industrial and Environmental Toxicology Congress (IETOX 2020), organised and hosted virtually by the Turkish Industrial Toxicology Society (ETOK) and chaired by Prof. Engin Tutkun, was held from 18 to 25 November 2020. ICOH was invited to contribute presentations to the congress, which was themed *Industrial toxicology and occupational health in small- and medium-sized enterprises*. The ICOH Scientific Committee on Industrial Hygiene (SC IH), chaired by Ms Lena Andersson (Sweden), contributed presentations for an ICOH track within IETOX 2020 on 20 November, which included the SC IH midterm business meeting. Dr Rosa Maria Orriols (Spain), ICOH Board member and member of SC IH, was one of two international co-chairs of IETOX 2020.

The ICOH Scientific Committee on Epidemiology in Occupational Health (SC EPICOH), chaired by Dr Roel Vermeulen (the Netherlands), hosted and organised the free-of-charge 'EPICOH 2020 Webinars' on 9 and 11 December 2020. The 2020 EPICOH Lifetime Achievement Award Winner, Dr Debra Silverman (USA), presented the keynote address titled 'Diesel exhaust and lung cancer: A 20-year saga' on 9 December, which was followed by the session 'Early career researchers outstanding abstract presentations'. The format of the session on 11 December was presentations and audience discussion on the topic 'Application of standardised tools to evaluate epidemiologic studies for risk assessment: Promises and pitfalls'.

The ICOH Scientific Committee on Occupational Health in the Construction Industry (SC OHICI), chaired by Dr Krishna Nirmalya Sen (India), organised and hosted a virtual symposium titled 'Recent trends in occupational health and safety in the construction industry' on 11 December 2020. The symposium was supported by the American Society of Safety Professionals – Indian Chapter.

## WORKPLACE HEALTH WITHOUT BORDERS

Founded in 2011 by a group of occupational hygienists and other activists with the goal of engaging volunteers (concerned professionals in OSH and other fields) in improving workplace health in regions of the world with under-served worker populations, Workplace Health Without Borders (WHWB, [www.whwb.org](http://www.whwb.org)) held its annual general meeting (AGM) on 9 November 2020. The new WHWB Board was elected, comprising 15 members from around the world, including three members from developing countries – Prof. Vanessa Cruvinel (Brazil), Ms Claudina Nogueira (South Africa and ICOH) and Mr Ehi Iden (Nigeria and OSHAfrica). Some Board members will serve for the term ending with the 2021 AGM and others will serve for the term ending with the 2022 AGM.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the training and project activities carried out by WHWB members on a volunteer basis around the world and, as a result, WHWB has focused on organising and hosting webinars and monthly teleconferences, mostly on COVID-19-related hot topics, since the beginning of the year. Examples of presentations are:

- COVID-19 resources available through the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA)
- Control banding and COVID-19: Simplifying risk communication
- Control banding in education
- COVID-19 response training towards schools re-opening: Lessons from Africa
- Vietnam: Back to school in the context of COVID-19
- Why should we get serious about airborne COVID-19 transmission in schools?
- Harvard University risk reduction strategies for re-opening of schools
- An update on COVID-19 rapid testing
- Infectious dose and COVID-19
- Infection control for OSH professionals
- Respiratory protection and COVID-19
- COVID-19 and informal waste workers
- COVID-19: Trajectory of a pandemic

## OSHAfrica

The Occupational Safety and Health Africa (OSHAfrica) Foundation was founded in 2017 with the principal aim of bringing together OSH professionals from across Africa, creating an atmosphere for

collaborative work and sharing of knowledge and OSH data across different countries and sub-regions in Africa. On 4 November 2020, OSHAfrica launched OSHversity, a virtual training platform that offers free OSH training to new graduates who are interested in pursuing careers in OSH. These trainings are funded through proceeds from paid trainings offered to corporate organisations. More information can be accessed at: <http://www.oshversity.com/>

### CLOSER TO HOME...

The SASOM national office in Pretoria has relocated to new premises in Montana after being based in Meyerspark for many years. The new contact details are:

- Physical address: Plot 59, Dr van der Merwe Avenue, Montana, Pretoria (new)
- Postal address: PO Box 32, Silverton, 0127 (unchanged)
- Telephone number: +27 (0) 87 288 0893 (new)

For the benefit of its members, SASOM continues to share information and invitations for online events related to COVID-19 as well as other topics organised by both national and international organisations. The SASOM national office has continued sharing SASOM position papers and information updates with its members, as well as dealing with daily queries, website updates and membership applications or renewals.

Guidance documents, scientific publications, and online event invitations from various sources, including SASOM, have been shared with members. Examples are:

- SASOM Position Statement on 'South African Thoracic Society (SATS) Update: Position Statement on Pulmonary Function Testing'
- SASOM Position Statement on COVID-19 antibody and antigen testing in the workplace
- Scientific paper by Drs JB (Tim) Laurens and PA Carstens titled 'Cannabis legislation and testing for cannabis use in safety- and risk-sensitive environments' (S Afr Med J 2020;110 (10):995-998. <https://doi.org/10.7196/SAMJ.2020.v110i10.14615>)
- 'South Africa COVID-19 rapid response survey' – a University of Cape Town study of the psychological and behavioural responses of selected public service providers in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic
- The National Institute for Occupational Health's (NIOH's) *OccuZone Newsletter* Vol. 2, No. 2, October 2020 (<https://www.nioh.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/NIOH-OccuZone-Volume-2-Issue-2-October-2020-F.pdf>)
- An invitation to a collaborative webinar on ergonomics presented by the Southern African Institute for Occupational Hygiene (SAIOH – sister organisation of SASOM), the Ergonomics Society of South Africa (ESSA) and the Department of Employment and Labour (DoEL) on 16 October 2020
- An invitation to a webinar presented by the NIOH titled 'Occupational health surveillance of COVID-19 in South African workplaces' on 20 October 2020
- An invitation to a webinar co-hosted by the African Union and the Africa CDC titled 'COVID-19 and mental health: Highlighting the status quo of psychiatric and neuropsychiatric outcomes and effective prevention and management' (part of the webinar series on mental health aspects of COVID-19), on 22 October 2020
- An invitation to a virtual workshop hosted by the Mine Health and Safety Council (MHSC) to provide feedback on the findings of the research project 'COE 180607: Review of the current Occupational Exposure Limits (OELs) as listed in Schedule 22.9(A)

of the Mine Health and Safety Act' on 15 and 22 October 2020

- An invitation to a webinar presented by the NIOH titled 'The triple burden of COVID-19, HIV and TB in the workplace' on 29 October 2020
- An invitation to two webinars hosted by the South African Medical Association (SAMA) titled 'Live chat with Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize on the now and the future of healthcare with doctors' on 6 October 2020, and 'Has COVID-19 assisted with the National Health Insurance (NHI) roll-out plan?' on 3 November 2020
- An invitation to a free webinar presented by the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM) and the AIHA titled 'Industrial hygiene and occupational and environmental medicine: Optimising collaboration amidst the COVID-19 pandemic' on 5 November 2020
- An invitation to the online Biennial NIOH Research Day on 19 November 2020, which was attended by over 150 participants
- An invitation from the DoEL to the free virtual launch of the Asbestos Abatement Regulations, 2020 as scheduled by the director general of the DoEL, on 27 November 2020. The NIOH partnered with the DoEL in a supportive capacity.

Dr André Kotzé, vice chair of SASOM, presented at the virtual retirement celebration event for Prof. David Rees, on behalf of SASOM and its chair, Prof. Daan Kocks. The event was organised and hosted by the NIOH and the Wits School of Public Health on 30 October 2020 to honour Prof. Rees' life's work and valuable contributions to occupational health and occupational medicine in southern Africa and beyond. In recognition of his dedication and service, Prof. Rees was awarded the status of SASOM honorary life member.

The SASOM national office hosted the meeting of the *Occupational Health Southern Africa* editorial board on 13 November 2020, on its Zoom platform. As part of its secretarial support for MEDICHEM, the SASOM national office hosted a Zoom meeting titled 'MEDICHEM 2020 Member Update' on 20 November 2020. The last SASOM ExCo meeting of the year was held on 26 November 2020. It was a virtual meeting and was aligned with the usual format of the SASOM AGM, which was not held this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Renewal of SASOM membership for 2021 is now in progress, with membership renewal forms and invoices being sent out via e-mail. Membership application forms are required to be completed only in respect of new applicants. Active members will automatically receive an invoice to renew their membership, with a request to inform the SASOM national office in the event of a change in personal details.

The SASOM national office will close for the year-end holidays on 15 December 2020 and reopen on 4 January 2021.

### GET WELL WISHES AND GREETINGS FOR THE FESTIVE SEASON

SASOM takes this opportunity to wish its chair, Prof. Kocks, a speedy recovery from his hospitalisation for COVID-19 complications. Prof. Kocks is making good progress and recovering well in the comfort of his home and in the company of his loving family – we are all very grateful and relieved that he is back on the road to being healthy again.

Having survived a very challenging and unprecedented year in the face of the COVID-19 global pandemic, SASOM wishes all its members and their families and communities 'compliments of the festive season', and healthy and safe holidays. May 2021 be a more hopeful, joyous, successful and rewarding year for you and your loved ones. Above all, may you remain healthy and safe in 2021!