

OBUASI MUNICIPAL ASSEMBLY'S HEALTH HAZARD EVALUATION PROGRAM: PROMOTING COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH THROUGH PARTNERSHIP.

Background

The Obuasi Municipal Assembly's **Health Hazard Evaluation** (HHE) program is a district environmental health safety program administered in partnership with the Health and Social Care Foundation and the premier Pre University. It was developed to comply with a mandate included in the occupational safety guidelines to investigate occupational hazards reported by workers. "following a written request by any employer or authorized representative of employees, to determine whether any substance normally found in the place of employment has potentially toxic effects in such concentrations as used or found."

The level of aid offered via the HHE program ranges from written correspondence between the joint evaluation committee and the inquiring party and a site visit from the evaluation committee representative. Following each site visit, the committee provides a report detailing the hazards found and outlining remediation recommendations. The final report is given to the requester, the employer, employee representatives, the Municipal Assembly and other appropriate agencies. The employer is required to post the final report; however, the Municipal assembly has the authority to force the employer to comply with the recommendations stated in it.

Requests

A Municipal HHE can be requested in the private sector and public workplaces and areas by an employee who is currently an employee at the workplace of concern and has the signatures of two other employees or somebody within the mining community. If the workplace has three or fewer employees, the signature of only one employee is enough. An officer of a labor union that represents employees for collective bargaining can also request an HHE and any management official may request an HHE on behalf of the employer. When the workplace is part of a State or local government, Municipal authority's consent is necessary. The cooperation of the employer and people within the community may be necessary before the committee can do an evaluation.

Health Hazards Evaluation (HHE) process

The joint evaluation committee first sends a letter to the person making the request. Then the JEC sends information back to this person or can make a referral to another agency. This letter of referral is sent within four to six weeks. If needed, a project officer is assigned. This usually happens if a telephone consultation or visit to the workplace is necessary. Before visiting the workplace, however, JEC also contacts the employer or community involved. JEC does not usually conduct surprise visits. After JEC addresses the HHE, JEC reports its preliminary findings to the Municipal Assembly, employers, and employee representatives (such as labor unions) and Communities. Verbal reports are usually given to employers and the employee representatives. At this point, the results are mostly incomplete. A written interim report is sometimes proffered. After more research into the HHE, JEC compiles a final report. This report is sent to the Municipal Assembly, the employer, the employee representatives, and other

agencies. The employer or community must then post this report and the information therein where all employees or people can view it.

Employee/Client protection

There is some protection for employees and client who report the health hazard. If an employee requests it, JEC can refuse to give the employer the name of the employees who report the health hazard. Additionally, due to the Occupational Safety and Health Act and the Mine Safety and health Act, employers may not punish employees for reporting the health hazard.

Completed reports

JEC has completed over 9 HHE reports detailing on-site workplace evaluations in the Obuasi Municipality. All final HHE reports are available at the Municipal Assembler's office. These include HHEs for land degradation, waste management, tobacco smoke exposure among casino dealers, and exposure to peak levels of carbon monoxide during the cold weather months. Levels of isocyanides, solvents, total dust, and noise. Recommendations are presented for control of exposures, and to help reduce other exposures.

CONCLUSION

From the academic perspective, health hazard evaluations are beneficial because they provide faculty and students with the opportunity to engage in public health practice and encounter new issues that advance the science of environmental health through research. From the perspective of a public health department, health hazard evaluations are beneficial because they address priority environmental health concerns and build the capacity of department personnel to conduct health hazard evaluations with internal resources. A collaborative health hazard evaluation program increases public health capacity by developing new approaches to environmental health problems and by sharing limited resources. Also the evaluation of existing environmental health data can be used to create meaningful indicator measures to further understanding of environment-related problems and to help prioritize and guide interventions.