Health Program Vulnerability Assessment

Early this year I outlined our Agency Safety Initiative to improve the risk management processes in use within NASA.

Today I want to emphasize another facet of our safety initiative that is equally important: assessing health improvement. By "health" I mean the prevention of harmful exposure to chemical, physical and biological hazards, and the proactive delivery of health care services to prevent disease.

To achieve this goal we must answer some fundamental questions: Are we conducting baseline assessments of all operations to identify all potentially hazardous exposures to chemicals and physical operations? Have we all conducted a vulnerability assessment to gauge the worst scenarios for chemical release? How ready is each Center to respond to those releases? Have we taken a closer look at our capability for providing life saving services? After downsizing, have we maintained the core capabilities we need to assure the health of our workforce? By focusing on these types of questions, managers can help assure and improve the health of our workforce.

I am proud of NASA's health and safety record. I am asking that we join together to improve NASA's workforce safety in the 21st century.

NASA Actions

Principal Center

- Utilize self-assessment approach that focuses on the evaluation of environmental health management systems and includes evaluation elements addressing vulnerability assessment. -- Ongoing

- Develop and provide training and professional development in the important and proactive area of exposure assessment strategies. -- In Progress

NASA Centers

- Centers must respond to this serious issue by looking inward and evaluating their situations using these key questions:

- Are we as senior managers engaged enough to assure ourselves that health -- as well as safety -- receives the priority and visibility it needs?

- Are there sufficient resources allocated to health risk management to cover our vulnerabilities?

- Does your Center maintain the processes necessary for early involvement of health hazard analysis?

- Is your clinic ready with the equipment and personnel needed for emergency medical response?

- Are we conducting baseline assessments of all operations to identify all potentially hazardous exposures to injurious chemicals and physical operations?

- Have we all conducted a vulnerability assessment to gauge our worst or top ten scenarios for chemical release and how ready each Center is to respond to those releases?

- Have we taken a closer look at our capability for providing life saving services at our medical clinics and asked ourselves whether, in the quest to manage through our downsizing, we have maintained the core capability we need to assure the health of our workforce?

Background

While the Centers are scrambling to keep up with customer requests, new programs and projects, and while we are doing a better job of looking at the hazards associated with new projects, we may have other long standing operations presenting potential health risks. All Center Directors should evaluate whether their safety and health organizations have identified potentially hazardous operations. Have they monitored all of the Center's operations for potential exposures? Have engineering controls been identified -- including replacement processes and chemicals? Do the engineering controls such as local exhaust systems work? How well are your personal protective equipment programs managed? The management team must take a critical look at this important area.

Every NASA Center manages operations that utilize extremely hazardous materials that if released, could pose significant health risk to our workforce, to adjacent communities, and possibly even to our national asset facilities.

NASA Centers may feel they have a handle on the toxic gases in use, have outlined response procedures, obtained monitoring equipment, etc. What is being missed, however, is the fact that daily there are different gases on sites that are not used by NASA. These gases are stored on the delivery truck, destined for the gas supplier's next customer after leaving NASA. Those gases included arsine, silane and other extremely hazardous materials. What gases or other toxic materials, which belong to other businesses, are on NASA sites each day? Preparations to deal with a mishap involving those materials must be prepared. Processes to prevent materials belonging to other customers from being on your site must be developed.