SAFE COMMUNITY NEWS

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How can we improve equity in safety?

One hundred and eighty people participated in the "How can we improve equity in safety?" conference in Iceland. An advisory group on child and youth accident prevention has been established in Iceland, and this group now co-operates with the country's already existing Accident Prevention Committee. It is essential for Iceland to look specifically at children, because – despite the fact that the incidence of fatal accidents is low – Iceland still remains highest among the Nordic countries with regard to child-accident fatalities.

We were introduced to the tremendously valuable work of volunteers in rescue operations in Iceland, the roots of which lie in "search and rescue" with regard to accidents at sea. Other rescue organisations have their roots in the Boy Scout Rescue Team and the Air Ground Rescue Team. All these organisations have now been merged into the Icelandic Association for Search and Rescue.

We learned that the Vikings were skilled shipbuilders who "learned by doing". In the age of modern technology it is quite common to blame a person for an accident, and to claim that everything is due to human error rather than technical failure.

However, there are often multiple and quite complex scenarios that lead to accident occurrence. Often, the organisation of work is such that it increases the risk of injury, but when an accident happens, it is the worker who takes the blame. This clearly leaves considerable room for improvement. Accordingly, safety culture is something we should know and understand better if we are to reduce accidents dramatically.

Social differences in injury risks

The total burden of injuries is worse in low-income than in high-income countries. Alongside economic development, technological development is presumed to play an important role as a determinant of safety in human living, working and traffic environments. Social conflicts and societal instability are major sources of ill-health and insecurity. The most recent example is from the newly independent states of eastern and central Europe. There are alarming reports of a dramatically deteriorated health situation. Injury is a sensitive indicator of such changes. To combat inequity, each of us has to do his work well. Safety promoters must increase awareness of safety issues among the public, specifically targeting deprived groups, and politicians must come up with legislative measures specific to the most serious health hazards of the time. The aim is to reduce the gap in health status between countries and between socio-economic groups within countries.

A future scenario for accident prevention was presented to us. In affluent western societies basic needs and personal safety will be taken more and more for granted. The prospect of more intelligent systems resulting from digitalisation will offer new technological ways of designing safer environments at lower cost.

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Conferences

11th International Congress on Circumpolar Health 4-9 June 2000 Harstad, Norway

Symposia are planned on topics of particular importance to arctic indigenous peoples, including Community-based Injury Prevention, Circumpolar WHO Safe Communities.
Abstract deadline: 15 January
Further information: http://www.hoarr.no/icch/
E-mail: administrasjon@hoarr.no

A Manual for Cost Calculations in Safe Communities

The main task of the seminar, "Cost Calculation and Cost-effectiveness in Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion – Theory and Practice", held in Prague in October 1999, was – by means of presentations and work groups – to draft a "Manual for Cost Calculations in Safe Communities". Participants included health economists, "Safe Community" practitioners, and safety-promotion researchers. The selection of participants was made in order to get the correct international and professional mix for the task of developing a manual.

The conclusion drawn from the work-group discussions was that the manual must offer guidelines that are very easy to use, and accepted by both practitioners and researchers. The manual must act as a practical tool for demonstrating costs and benefits to decision-makers and politicians. The model underpinning the manual should encompass three levels: descriptive, projective and evaluative. It should also measure the costs of injuries broken down into various categories: medical costs, lost production capacity, human costs, damage to property, intervention costs, and other financial costs. The manual should be made available on the net, and used as a kind of "cookbook".

The conclusions of the seminar will be presented in a report to SafeComm-9 in Dhaka in February, and at the 5th World Conference to be held in New Delhi in March 2000. The report will provide input for the future activities of two work groups, and will be tested at three levels: national, central, and local. A second, follow-up seminar will be held in Viborg in Denmark, 30 September – 3 October 2001. This will enable further development of the manual.

Aime Laur

Courses

International Course on Injury Control and Safety Promotion
including participation in the
5th World Conference on
Injury Prevention and Control
New Delhi, India, 2-8 March 2000
Further information: mahesh@cbme.iitd.ernet.in
maheshgaur@hotmail.com

Safety & Health Expo Conference
Hong Kong, China 21-22 March 2000
Occupational & Health Council
Further information: E-mail:oshc@oshc.org.hk

MPH Course in Safety Promotion
Stockholm, Sweden
15-26 May 2000
Application deadline: 16 February
Further information:
E-mail:moa.sundstrom@socmed.sll.se

Third International Ph.D Course on Safety Promotion Research:
A Public Health Approach to Accident and Injury Prevention
Stockholm, Sweden
16-27 October 2000
Application deadline: 26 May
Further information:
E-mail:moa.sundstrom@socmed.sll.se

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